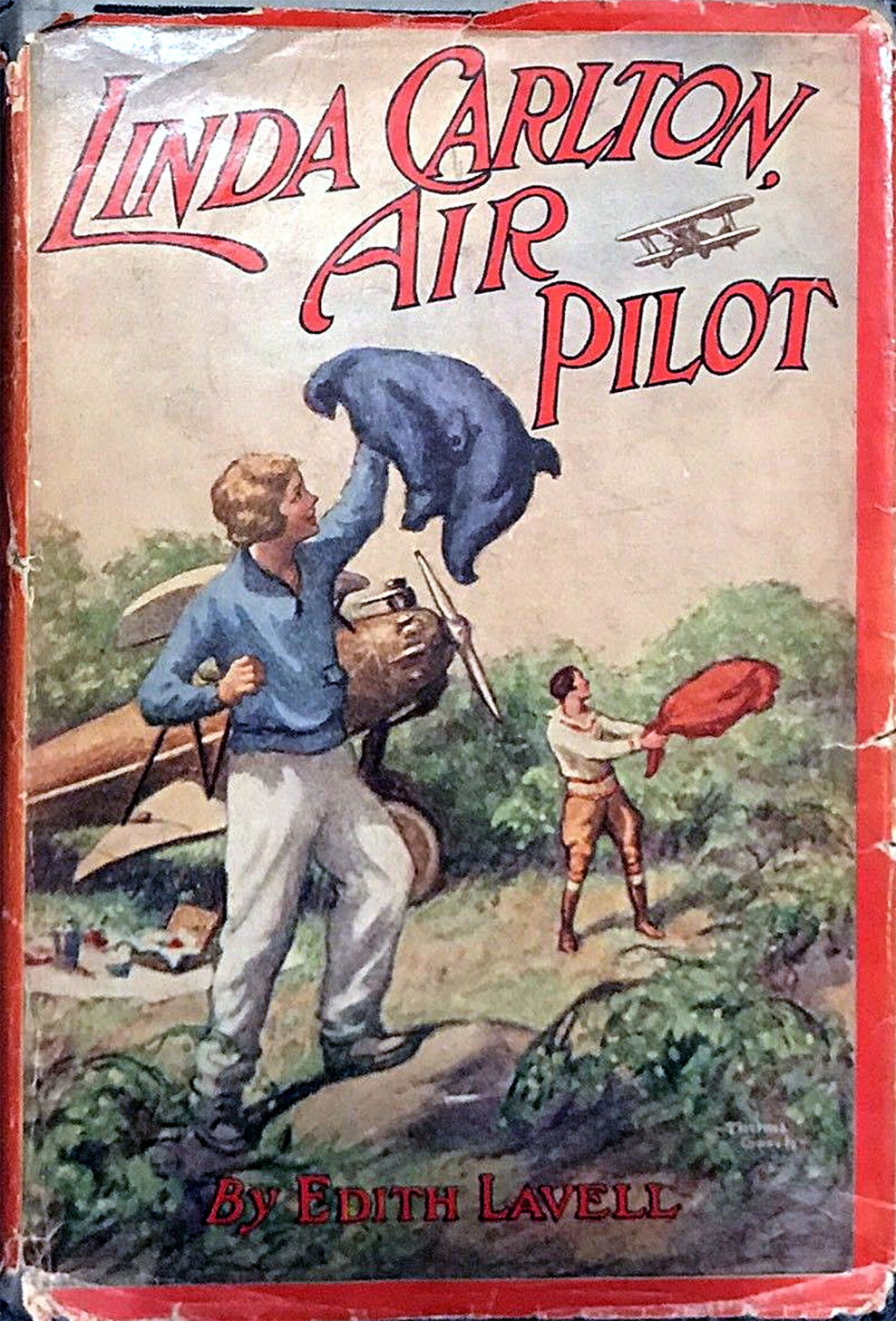
Linda Carlton, Air Pilot



By Edith Lavell

LINDA CARLTON AIR PILOT

LAVELL

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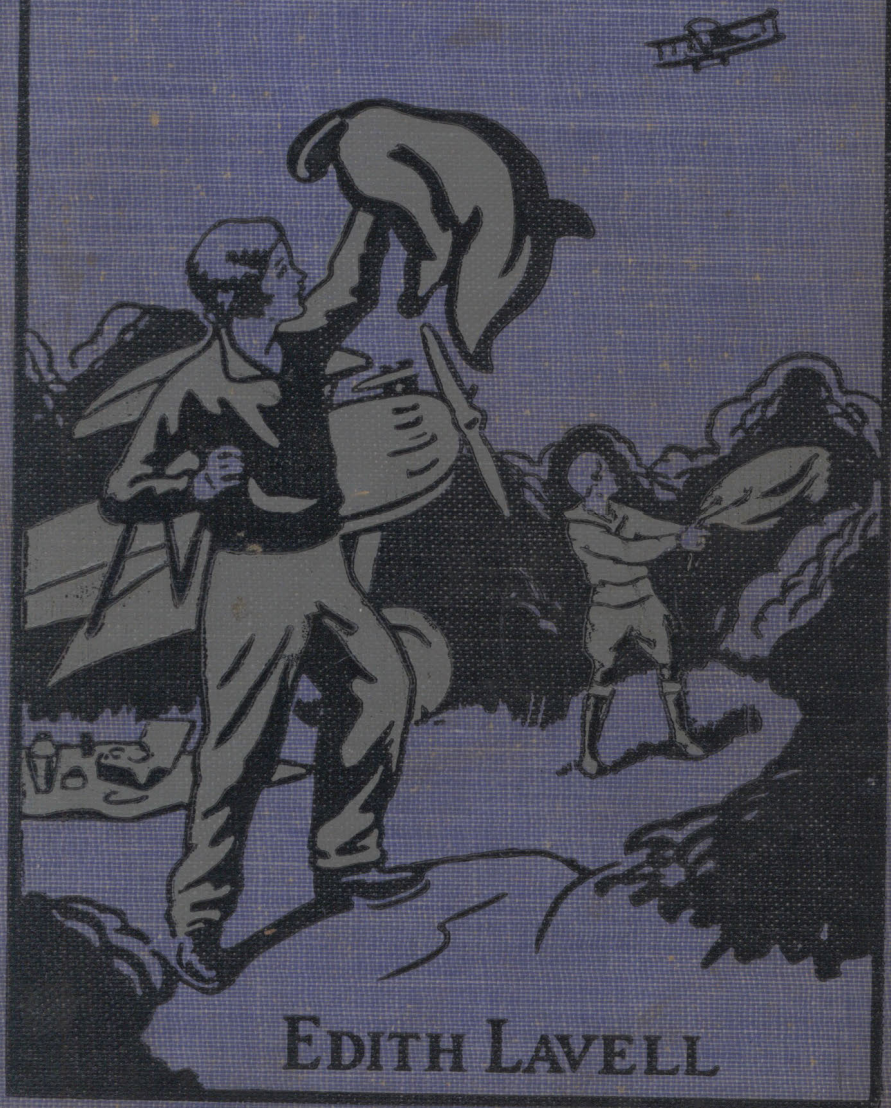
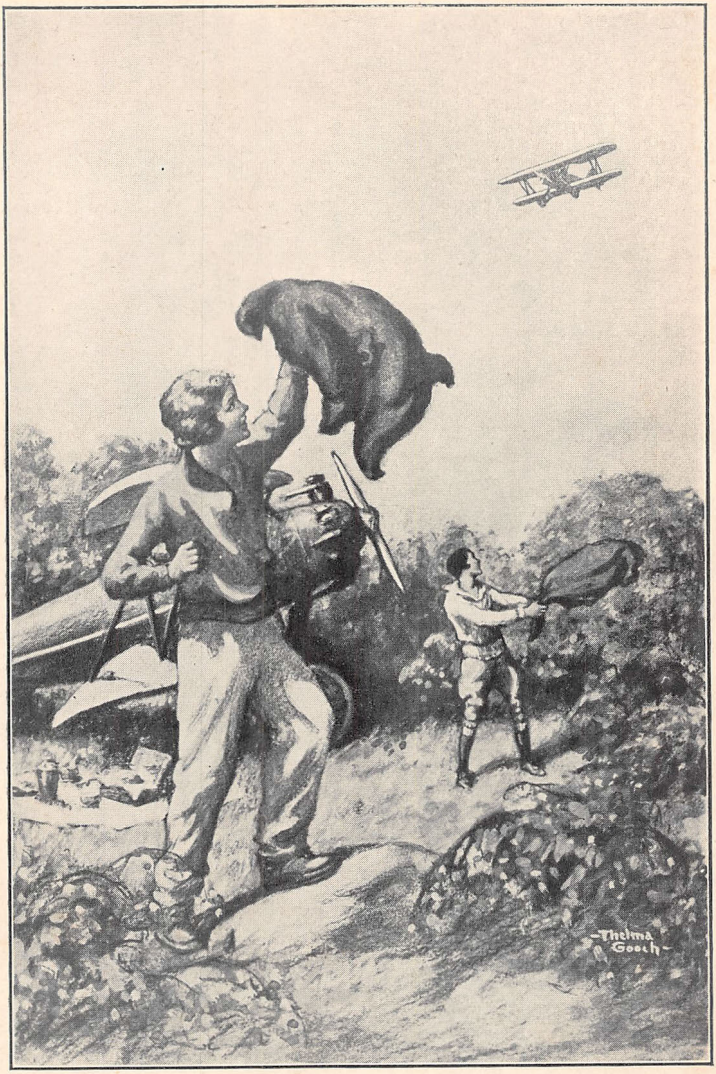
LINDA CARLTON, AIR PILOT



EDITH LAVELL



Both girls waved their arms and their coats in the air as signals of distress.

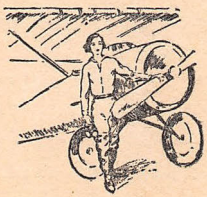
(Page 214) *(Linda Carlton, Air Pilot)*

LINDA CARLTON, AIR PILOT

By EDITH LAVELL

AUTHOR *of*

"The Girl Scout Series," "Linda Calton's Ocean Flight," Linda Carlton's Island Adventure," Etc.



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Linda Carlton Series

Thrilling Adventure Stories of a Group of
Girl Aviation Enthusiasts

By EDITH LAVELL

LINDA CARTLON, AIR PILOT
LINDA CARLTON'S OCEAN FLIGHT
LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

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LINDA CARLTON, AIR PILOT

TO

MY HUSBAND

VICTOR LAMASURE LAVELL

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LINDA CARLTON, AIR PILOT

CHAPTER I

A Dangerous Ride

A BLUE sports roadster, driven by a girl in a lovely crêpe suit of the same color, threaded its way through the traffic of Spring City's streets to the concrete road that led to the aviation field on the outskirts. Passing the city's limits, the car sped along under the easy assurance of its competent driver, whose eyes were bluer than its paint, deeper than the dress that she was wearing. They were shining now with happiness, for the end of this ride promised the most thrilling experience of her life. That afternoon Linda Carlton was to have her first flight in an airplane!

She parked her car outside of the field and locked it cautiously. Jumping out, she fairly skipped inside the boundary.

A tall, good-looking young man in a flier's suit came from one of the hangars to meet her.

"Miss Carlton?" he said, extending his hand.

"Yes—Mr. Mackay. You see I'm here—a little early, I expect. You haven't forgotten your promise?"

His pleasant face darkened, and he looked doubtfully at the sky.

"I'm afraid it may rain, Miss Carlton. We've suspended pleasure trips for today. But perhaps tomorrow——"

"Oh, no!" she cried in deep disappointment, and the young man believed that her eyes grew moist. "I can't get away tomorrow, or any other day this week. You see I'm a senior at school, and I'm just rushed to death."

"Well, that's too bad," he said, looking again at the sky. "And of course it may not rain after all. But orders are orders, you know."

The girl looked down at the ground, probably, he thought, to hide the tears that would come to her eyes. She was so pretty, so serious, so anxious to go up. It evidently wasn't only a whim with her; she really wanted to fly—like Amelia Earhart, and Elinor Smith. How he hated to deny her!

"Isn't there something you could do?" she finally asked. "Take me up as one of your friends—not as a visitor to the aviation field. . . . Why, Mr. Mackay, suppose your sister

came to see you today, wouldn't you be allowed to take her up?"

"Yes," he replied, smiling. "But that would be on my responsibility, not the school's."

"Then," she pleaded, and she was radiant again with enthusiasm, "couldn't *I* be your responsibility?"

He nodded, won over to her wishes.

"If you put it that way, Miss Carlton, I can't refuse! But I'll have to take you in the plane I'm working on now—making some tests with —and it isn't the most reliable plane in the world. Not one we use to take visitors up in."

"But if it's safe enough for you, it's safe enough for me. I'm satisfied."

"I'm afraid your parents wouldn't be," he objected.

"There I think you're wrong," she asserted. "My father believes in taking chances. He has always let me do dangerous things—ride horseback, and drive a car and swim far out in the ocean. . . . And my mother is dead."

"Very well, then," agreed Mackay. "Please come over here with me. I have been trying to fix up an old biplane, and I think I have her in shape now. But we'll both wear parachutes for precaution."

Her heart fluttering wildly from happiness,

but not at all from fear, Linda accompanied the young flier across the huge field to the runway, where a biplane was resting in readiness for its test. Mackay put her into the cockpit, examined the engine again, and the parachutes, helped her to fasten one of the latter on, in case of an accident, and started the motor. A minute later the plane taxied forward, faster and faster, until it rose from the ground.

"Oh!" cried Linda, in a tone of deepest joy, although her companion could not hear her for the roar of the motor. "Oh, I'm so happy!"

Up, up, up they went, until they reached the clouds, where the atmosphere seemed misty and foggy. But it did not matter to Linda that the sky was not blue; nothing could spoil the ecstasy she experienced in knowing that at last she was where she had always longed to be.

Never for a moment was she the least bit dizzy. The sensation of floating through the air was more marvelous than anything she had ever dreamed of.

For some minutes she just allowed herself to dream of the future when she herself would be in control of a plane, sailing thus through the skies. Then she remembered with a start that if she ever expected her ambitions to be fulfilled, it would be necessary to learn how flying was

accomplished. She began to examine everything in the cockpit. It was too noisy to ask her companion any questions, but she watched him carefully and tried to figure out what she could for herself. She identified the joystick, which controlled the plane, and she recognized the compass and the altimeter, which registered the height—now sixteen hundred feet—to which they had climbed. All the while she made mental notes of questions she would ask her pilot when they reached the ground.

Up, up they went until at last they were beyond the clouds, and saw the bright sunshine about them. It was symbolic to Linda; she resolved that in after life, whenever she was unhappy or distressed, she would fly on wings to the clear sunlight above. It was almost as if there she would actually find God.

She was so happy that it was some time before she noticed the queer sound the motor was making. Then, glancing questioningly at her companion, she saw a tight, drawn look about his lips, a ghastly pallor in his face. Something was evidently wrong! The motor made an uneven sound, threatening to stall, and the plane went into a tail-spin. Mackay was frantically leaning forward, doing something she did not understand.

"Motor's dying!" he cried, as he managed to right the plane. His voice shook with greater dread than he had ever before experienced. For, fearless though he was for himself, he was scared to death for the pretty girl at his side.

What a fool he had been, he thought, to allow her to come! He would give his own chances of safety that minute if she could be sure of her life! So young, so sweet, so utterably lovely! A great lump rose in his throat, as he took another look at his engine. But he was helpless.

Grim with terror, he pointed to her parachute. And then, to his amazement, he realized how perfectly calm she was!

"You step off first," he said, thankful they both had their parachutes. "I'll stay with the plane as long as I can."

Never in his life did Ted Mackay go through such a horrible moment as that instant when Linda Carlton, at a height of two thousand feet, stepped so bravely from the edge of the plane into the yawning space below. Even if he himself were killed, he could never know sharper agony. Yet the girl herself was gamely smiling!

He managed to pilot the plane a little farther, in the hope that when it did crash, it would not come anywhere near her, and then, when he

could no longer keep it from falling, he stepped off himself.

Down he went, and his parachute opened with perfection, but he, in his tenseness, thought only of Linda, and of her luck with hers. And he prayed as he had never prayed before in his life, not even at his most perilous moments, where death seemed most certain.

No descent ever seemed so slow, so prolonged, but at last he reached the ground. And there, still smiling at him, was lovely Linda Carlton!

Chapter II

Graduation

"Thank Heaven you're safe!" cried Ted Mackay, as he disentangled himself from his parachute. "You certainly are a game little sport, Miss Carlton!"

"I don't see why," returned Linda. "People jump from planes with parachutes every day!"

"I know. But it was all so sudden. And it is always a pity when anyone's first flight ends disastrously. It makes you feel that you never want to see an airplane again."

"Well, it won't make me feel that way," replied the girl, lightly. "I'd go up again right away if you'd take me."

"I'm afraid I can't. But I'm mighty glad to hear you talk that way. I think you're cut out for a flier. Now let's hunt the wreck."

After they had located the damaged plane, and examined its shattered pieces, they hiked back to the aviation field together, talking all the while about flying. Linda asked Ted one

question after another, which he answered as well as he could without having a plane to demonstrate, and he promised to lend her some books on the subject.

"You must come over and take a course of instruction at our Flying School," he advised. "As soon as you can."

"Oh, I hope to!" she assured him, eagerly. "Maybe after I graduate. Why, I'm almost eighteen! Most boys of my age who cared as much about it as I do would have been flying a couple of years. Because you can get a license when you're sixteen, can't you?"

"Yes. . . . It's going to be fun to teach you," he added, as they approached the field, and Linda stopped beside her car. "Good-by! I'll expect to see you soon!"

His hope, however, was not fulfilled until two weeks later, when Linda again slipped over to the field, between engagements, for another ride in the air. This time she was only one among a group of visitors, and she went up in a plane that was both new and trustworthy.

Her time was so limited—it was a week before Commencement—that she had only chance for a few words with Ted Mackay. She told him that her class-day was the following Friday, and she timidly invited him to a dance which

she was giving at her home the night before the event.

"Thanks awfully," he said, more thrilled than he dared tell her at the invitation, "but I couldn't possibly come. . . . You see, Miss Carlton—I wouldn't fit in with your set."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Linda in disappointment. "We're not snobs, just because we go to Miss Graham's school!"

"Well, then, put it this way," he added: "I'm absolutely on my own—and I don't even have evening clothes!"

She smiled at his frankness, but she did not know that he told only part of his story—that he was supporting his mother and helping to put his younger sister through High School.

"All right, then—have it your own way—Ted," she agreed, holding out her hand. "I'll hope to see you some time after class-day."

From that hour on, it seemed as if every moment was filled with more things than she could possibly do. At last Friday came—as hot as any day in mid-summer, though it was still early June

Soon after two o'clock the audience began to arrive, and at half-past, the twenty-two graduates, in their white dresses, with their large bouquets or American Beauties or pink rose-

buds, filed in to take their seats on the flower-decked platform in the garden of the school grounds.

Fans waved, and the flowers wilted visibly, but nobody seemed to notice. For with the exercises the fun began, and everybody listened intently to the jokes and the compliments which came in turn to each and every member of Linda Carlton's class.

After Louise Haydock, the president, made her brief speech of greeting, the presenter took charge, and her remarks and her presents were clever without being cruel. Most of the latter she had purchased from the five-and-ten, but they all carried a point. To Linda Carlton she gave a toy car, because she thought that was what the latter was most interested in, and then she asked her to wait a moment, that she had something else for her.

Linda stood still, smiling shyly, and wondering whether her next gift would have anything to do with airplanes.

"Linda," continued the presenter, "we have this bracelet for you—in token of our affection. You have been voted the most popular girl in the class."

"Oh!" exclaimed Linda, and her eyelids fluttered in embarrassment. She was so surprised

that she didn't know what to say. Some of the other girls, who had been secretly hoping for this honor, which was always kept as a surprise until class-day, had even prepared speeches. But Linda had never given the matter a thought.

"I—I—thank you so much," she finally managed to stammer, as she stepped forward to receive the bracelet.

The audience stirred and clapped, for the girl was a favorite with everybody in Spring City.

"She certainly looks sweet today," whispered Mrs. Haydock, the mother of Linda's best friend. "There is nothing so becoming as white."

"Yes," agreed her aunt, who had taken care of Linda ever since her own mother had died when she was only a baby, "but I do wish she hadn't worn those flowers. She had half a dozen bouquets of American Beauties, and she picked out those ordinary pink roses! Sometimes Linda is queer."

"Yes, but who sent them?" inquired the other woman. "Probably the reason lies there! Ralph Clavering?"

"Ralph Clavering wouldn't buy a cheap bouquet like that—with all his father's mil-

lions!" exclaimed Miss Carlton. "No; he did send flowers, but Linda didn't wear them. These had no card."

Their conversation stopped abruptly, for the class prophet was being introduced. Twenty-one girls on the platform leaned forward expectantly, anxious to hear what the future held in store for them. Of course nobody actually believed that this girl could foretell their lives, but it was always fascinating to speculate about their fortunes.

She began with the customary jokes.

"Sara Wheeler" (the thinnest girl in the class), "is going into the food business, but will eat up the profits. However, she'll weigh two hundred pounds before she goes bankrupt. . . .

"Sue Emery, on the contrary, will finally succeed in reducing her weight—when she gets away from these girls and stops talking about it, instead of doing it—until she becomes Hollywood's star dancer. . . .

"Linda Carlton and Louise Haydock—the double l's, we call them, because they are always together—will both marry wealthy men and become the society leaders of Spring City. . . ."

At these words, Linda's Aunt Emily nudged Louise's mother, and smiled.

"That would suit us, wouldn't it, Mrs. Haydock?" she asked.

"Just what we want for our girls!" nodded her companion, in satisfaction.

It was over at last, the fun and the excitement, the class-day that the girls would keep in their memories for the rest of their lives. Hot, but happy, the graduates came down from the platform to find their friends and their families. Some of them wanted to linger, to talk things over, but Linda Carlton was anxious to get away. It had been wonderful to receive that beautiful bracelet, but somehow it would spoil it to talk about it.

And, in spite of all her happiness, there was a little hurt in her heart. Her father hadn't come home for his only child's graduation!

She came to where her aunt was standing, and put her arm through hers.

"Are you ready, Aunt Emily?" she asked.

"Of course, dear—if you want to go so soon. But wouldn't you like to stay and see your friends, and thank them?"

"Oh, I'll write notes," replied Linda.

"There's Ralph Clavering over there," remarked Miss Carlton, nodding in the direction of a tall, well-dressed young man on the other side of the lawn. "You could thank him for his

flowers. He'll probably think it queer if you don't, especially since you didn't wear them."

Linda smiled carelessly.

"Ralph Clavering probably sent roses to half a dozen girls today," she said lightly. "It's his boast that he's in love with the whole class! . . . No, I want to go home, Auntie. I'm tired."

"Certainly, dear. We'll go right away."

Nodding to friends as they walked across the beautiful garden where the out-door exercises had been held, they came to Linda's shining sports roadster, parked just outside the gate. It had been her father's present to her on the day that she was sixteen, and she had taken such care of it that even now, after a year and a half, it looked almost new.

"I think it was wonderful for you to receive the bracelet as the most popular girl," Miss Carlton said, as she got into the car. "Everything was really perfect—even the prophecy about your future."

Linda frowned at the recollection of those words; she hadn't liked that prophecy at all. As perhaps only Ted Mackay realized, her ambition was to fly, to fly so expertly that she could go to strange lands, do a man's work perhaps, carry out missions of importance. She

wanted to be known as one of the best—if not *the* best—aviatrix in America!

Ever since she was a child she had had some such longing. Perhaps it was her father who had been responsible for it. Restless and unhappy after her mother's death, he had given his baby to his sister to take care of, and had wandered from one place to another, only coming home every year or so, to see how Linda was growing. As if to make up to her for his absences, he brought her marvelous presents—presents that were intended rather for a boy than for a girl. Early in life she had learned to shoot a gun, ride a horse, and drive a car. No wonder that she dreamed of airplanes!

Her aunt, on the other hand, disapproved of this way of bringing up a girl. She wanted Linda to be just like the other fashionable wealthy young ladies in Spring City, to spend her time at parties and at the Country Club, and later to marry a rich man—like Ralph Clavering. Naturally the words of the class prophet pleased her.

Nor had she any idea that Linda did not agree with her, for her niece had always kept her dreams to herself. There was no use talking about them, Linda thought, for her aunt would never understand.

"And I guess the prophet was about right," continued Miss Carlton. "Any girl that gets seven bunches of flowers from seven different boys, won't have any difficulty getting married."

"But I don't want to get married, Aunt Emily!" protested Linda.

"Not yet, dear—of course. Why, you're only seventeen! I couldn't spare you now—just when you're free to be at home with me. Besides, I think every girl should have two years at least to do exactly as she pleases!"

Exactly as she pleases! Why, that would mean learning to fly! Oh, if Aunt Emily could know the fierce longing in her heart to become a really fine pilot, to train herself to make her mark in the world!

"So I want you to have a happy, care-free summer," continued the other, totally unaware of her niece's thoughts. "At first I thought we would go abroad, but on the whole that would be too strenuous, after this hectic year. The other girls' mothers agree with me. Mrs. Haydock and I were talking about it today, and we've practically decided to go to a charming resort on Lake Michigan that she says is most exclusive. There you can be with all your best friends."

Linda said nothing; she just couldn't be enthusiastic about wasting three months in that fashion. When she had been hoping to stay at home and enroll for a course at the Spring City Flying School!

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, dear?" persisted Miss Carlton, as Linda steered her car through the wide gates of their spacious estate. "You could swim and drive and play tennis and dance to your heart's content! With Louise —and—and—the Claverings! Mrs. Haydock told me they are going there too. Why, you'd meet all the right people!"

Linda sighed. Aunt Emily's ideas of the right people were not exactly hers—particularly at the present time. She wanted to meet flyers, men and women noted in the field of aviation, not merely wealthy society folk. But she could not say that to her aunt; the latter was afraid of airplanes, and had only grudgingly given her consent that Linda go up in one. Naturally she had never mentioned her accident.

"Well, we'll talk our plans over later," said Miss Carlton, when Linda failed to make a reply. "I guess you're too tired to think about anything now. And," she added as she stepped

from the car, "don't you want to leave your car here, and let Thomas put it away?"

"No, thank you, Auntie," she replied, for she did not like even so capable a chauffeur as Thomas to touch her precious roadster. "It'll only take a minute."

As Linda walked slowly back to the house, she was thinking of Ted Mackay. For she believed those wilted flowers at her waist were his. There had been no card, but they had come from a small flower shop at the other end of Spring City—not the expensive shop that most of her friends patronized. She would go over to the school soon, and thank him. But she would have to tell him that she was obliged to give up her own plans for the summer! Tears of disappointment came into her eyes, and she wondered if there weren't some way it could be arranged. Maybe if she asked her father. . . .

The thought of her father drove everything out of her mind. He hadn't even bothered to come home! Nothing else seemed to matter.

As she entered the living-room, she found her aunt waiting for her.

"Come in, dear—and get some rest," said Miss Carlton. "You look so tired that you actually seem unhappy."

Linda forced a smile.

"Is something worrying you, dear? Or is it just the heat and the rush?"

"I don't know," answered the girl, sinking into a deep chair by the window. "I—I—guess I'm just foolish, Aunt Emily." There was a catch in her voice. "But I'm so disappointed that Daddy didn't come for my Commencement. And I wrote to the ranch three times to remind him!"

Miss Carlton nodded; her brother's ways were past her understanding. How anybody could be so indifferent to such a lovely daughter as Linda! And yet when he was home, no father could be more affectionate. It was just that he was absent-minded, that he hated to be tied down to dates and places. He might be at his ranch in Texas now, or he might have wandered off to Egypt or to South America, without even telling his family. He had been like that, ever since Linda's mother had died.

"I'm not so surprised at that as I am at his not sending you a present," commented Miss Carlton. "He may never have received your letters—or he may drop in a week late. . . . But you mustn't let that worry you, Linda—you have to take your father as he is. . . . And you must get some rest for tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" repeated the girl, vaguely.

"Yes. The Junior League Picnic. You haven't told me whom you invited."

"Why—I—a——"

"You forgot to invite anybody!" laughed Miss Carlton. "I know you—why, you're something like your father about social engagements, my dear! And of course all the nicest boys will be asked already! I know that Louise is going with Ralph Clavering—Mrs. Haydock told me today."

"That's fine," commented Linda, indifferently. "They're great pals."

"But whom will you ask? At this late date?"

"I really think I'd rather stay home, Auntie, if you don't mind. Because—well—Daddy might come—and I'd hate to be so far away. They're going all the way over to Grier's woods, I recall hearing Dot say, and you know that's at least fifteen miles."

"Of course, dear—do just as you like," replied her aunt, putting her motherly arms around her. "Only don't count too much on your father's coming!"

So Linda went to bed that night, little thinking that her plans would be changed the following morning, and that, in later years, she was to look back upon that day as one of the most wonderful of her whole life!

Chapter III

Her Father's Gift

As Linda had no plans for the day after her class exercises, she had intended to sleep late. But the arrival of her chum, Louise Haydock, accompanied by Ralph Clavering and his Harvard room-mate, Maurice Stetson, changed things for her.

At half-past eight her aunt came into her bedroom, half apologetically, half smiling.

"Linda dear, I want you to wake up," she said. "You have company."

"Yes?" replied the girl sleepily.

"You are rested, aren't you? And it's so much cooler. It's a real June day—the kind the poets write about!"

Linda sat up in bed, and blinked her eyes. Then suddenly she thought of her father. Did Aunt Emily mean he had come?

"Daddy?" she asked excitedly. "Do you mean he's here?"

Miss Carlton's smile faded; she had not

meant to mislead her niece. It was cruel to disappoint her.

"No, dear. It's only Louise—with Ralph and another boy. They want you to wake up, and go on the picnic."

"Oh, I see. . . . But you know I didn't invite anybody, Aunt Emily."

"That's just it. You're to go with this other boy. He's Ralph's room-mate, and he's here on a visit. You will go, won't you, dear?"

"Yes, of course, if Lou wants me to. I'll get dressed right away. . . . And Auntie, may I have some strawberries up here, to eat after I take my shower? That's all the breakfast I'll want."

"Certainly, dear. I'll send Anna up right away. And how soon shall I tell Louise that you'll be ready?"

"Ten minutes!"

Linda jumped out of bed, and began to sing as she took her cold shower. It was a wonderful day—a good world after all! Of course the picnic would be fun; she was glad now that she wasn't going to miss it. Lou was a peach to arrange things for her in this way! And it would be exciting to meet a new man. She wondered what he would be like, and hoped she would find him nice. But, even if she didn't, it

wouldn't be necessary to stay with him all day. There wasn't much "two's-ing" in their crowd.

Ten minutes later she found her visitors on the porch, singing and amusing themselves, for Miss Carlton had gone to oversee the packing of Linda's lunch. Ralph introduced his friend, Maurice Stetson, a short, light-haired youth, who was utterly at ease with everybody, and who seemed to think that he was born to be funny. Indeed, he called himself "the prince of wise-crackers." Linda, who was both sensitive and shy, was afraid she would be made uncomfortable by his comments.

"Miss *Linda* Carlton," he repeated, solemnly shaking her hand. "The famous Lindy's namesake? . . . Let's see—what year was that when he flew the Atlantic? About twenty-seven? Why, you can't be more than three years old!"

Linda smiled; she really couldn't laugh at the silly remark, though the others seemed to think him exceedingly witty.

"And is your ambition flying?" he asked.

Linda blushed; she had no desire to admit her dreams and ambitions to the general public.

"Doesn't everybody want to fly now-a-days?" she countered.

"Not your uncle Maurice!" replied the youth, gravely. "My dad gave me a plane, and I

wrecked it. I'm through! My flying almost took me to the angels!"

"What's this?" interrupted Miss Carlton, coming out on the porch with a hamper of lunch for the picnic. "You've been in an airplane accident?"

"And how!" he replied, feelingly.

"Now you see, Linda! You better not go over to that field again! I'm so afraid of planes!"

"All right, Aunt Emily," replied the girl, graciously. "You needn't worry today, anyhow. We're going to the picnic in cars."

But, had Miss Carlton seen Maurice Stetson behind the wheel of his yellow sports roadster, hitting seventy-five miles an hour, and all the while keeping up a conversation not only with Linda beside him, but with the couple in the rumble-seat as well, she would not have felt so satisfied.

Nevertheless, nothing happened, and the picnic promised to be lots of fun. The girls had selected a beautiful wooded spot outside of the city, where a lovely stream widened into a small lake, deep enough for swimming.

Most of the others had already arrived in their cars, when Louise's party drove up. Two large tents, on opposite sides of the lake, had

been set up early in the morning for bath-houses.

"Everybody into their suits!" cried Sara Wheeler, who seemed to be managing the picnic, because her mother was the chaperon. "First one into the water gets a prize!"

"Then I get it, without even trying," remarked Harriman Smith, a nice boy, and a particular friend of Linda's, "because I have mine on now! I got dressed in it this morning, and carried my other clothing."

"Lazy brute!" exclaimed Maurice, enviously, wishing that he had thought of such a labor-saving device.

In fifteen minutes the whole crowd were in the water, diving and swimming, and ducking each other, and finally dividing off into sides for a game of water-polo. It was only when they actually smelled the steaks that Mrs. Wheeler's cooks were broiling, that they were finally induced to leave the lake and get dressed.

A treasure-hunt through the woods was the program for the afternoon. Linda, who had expected to be coupled with Maurice Stetson for this event, was agreeably surprised to find herself with Ralph Clavering. Louise's doing, in all probability! No doubt she guessed that her chum did not care for Maurice.

They walked along slowly, keeping their eyes on the ground for all possible clews, chatting at intervals about the class-day and the usual gossip, and now and then, when they met other couples, stopping to compare notes. Finally Ralph spoke about his plans for the summer months.

"I'm hoping to persuade your aunt to go to Green Falls with us, Linda," he said. "There will be quite a bunch of us together. Dot Crowley, Sue, Sally Wheeler, and of course Lou and Kit—from your sorority, and some of the boys from our frat, besides several from Spring City. Harry Smith's going to get a job as a life-guard, and Maurice has promised to go. We ought to be able to make whoopee, all right!"

"Sounds good," admitted Linda, absently.

"Yes, and I really think we could pull off some serious work there."

"Serious work?" repeated Linda. As far as she knew, Ralph had never done any real work in his life.

"Yeah. In the competitions, I mean. I think if we go after it tooth and nail, you and I'd make a pretty good team to pull down the cup for the tennis doubles. They have a big meet at the end of the season that's the talk of the

whole Great Lakes region. . . . And Sally swings a mean club in golf. And look at Louise's diving!"

"Yes, that's true," agreed Linda. She had always liked golf and tennis and swimming, but somehow this year they had all lost their charm. It was different after you graduated, she decided. Then you wanted to make something out of your life—like Ted Mackay. There was no more time to be wasted.

"Promise me you'll go," begged Ralph, leaning over eagerly and putting his hand on her arm.

Instinctively she drew it away, but before she could answer, Louise and Maurice appeared from a cross-path that was hidden by tall bushes.

"Why, there's my little Lindy!" cried Maurice, though Linda was several inches taller than he was. "Grieving for papa?"

"Shedding tears," laughed Linda. But the words made her think of her own father, and she grew sober. Suppose he were home now—waiting for her! He never stayed more than a day; how she would hate to miss him!

"Has anybody found the treasure yet?" she inquired.

"I've found *two* treasures," replied Maurice

complacently, looking first at Louise and then at Linda.

"Forget it!" commanded Louise, tersely, lifting her head. She, like Linda, was tall, but in that the resemblance ended. Her dark, sleek hair was short and almost straight, and she wore earrings—even in swimming. She said she felt undressed without them—"practically immodest," were her exact words.

"No, but really—?" persisted Linda.

A wild shout from Dot Crowley, followed by a chorus of "Whoopee!" from half a dozen others, answered Linda's question immediately. Dot always was lucky. The others ran to the spot where the crowd was gathered, and Dot, a tiny, vivacious blonde, who could take child's parts in the amateur plays, was holding two boxes of golf balls triumphantly up to view.

"Do I have to give one box to that lazy kid?" she demanded, pointing scornfully at her long-legged partner, Jim Valier, who had been languidly following her around. At the time when she had discovered the prize, he was lolling under a tree, resting his "weary bones," as he said, smoking a cigarette.

"Sure you do!" he drawled. "Didn't I supply the brains to our combine?"

"Brains!" repeated Dot "Where did you

get 'em? I'll have to have you arrested for stealing 'em, if that's the case! But here—take your box!"

"Couldn't possibly," he said, waving them aside with his cigarette holder. "Besides, I hardly ever play golf. Too fatiguing."

"How about your school-girl figure?" asked Maurice. "Aren't you afraid if you don't exercise, you'll lose it?"

Everybody, even Linda, laughed, for Jim Valier was about the world's thinnest youth.

"He's really afraid somebody will mistake him for a golf-stick, and bang a ball with him," remarked Ralph.

In groups, and some in pairs, the whole crowd went back to the lake. After all that exercise and excitement, everybody wanted another dip to cool off. It was six o'clock by the time they all piled into their cars, and half-past when Linda reached home.

Hoping to find her father, as she had been hoping every day that week, she dashed up the steps quickly, merely waving good-by to her companions as the sports car shot from the driveway. And then, miraculously, she saw his beloved face at the door!

"Daddy!" she cried rapturously, rushing breathlessly into his arms.

He was taller than Linda, with a straight, lithe figure like that of a much younger man. His hair was dark, with just a little gray at the temples, and his skin deeply tanned from his out-door life. A sort of habitual smile played about his lips, as if he had made up his mind to find life pleasant, no matter what came.

"My dear little girl!" he said, quietly, patting her hair. "Will you forgive me for coming a day too late? Your Aunt Emily tells me that both Commencement and class-day are over—and you are an old Grad now!"

"Yes, but I don't mind, Daddy, so long as you came today!" she replied, squeezing his hand. "Maybe it's better this way, because I've been so rushed lately that I wouldn't have had much time to see you."

"You must tell me all about everything," he said, drawing her arm through his, and leading her down the steps of the porch. Of course he thought he meant what he said, but Linda knew from experience that if she did tell him, he wouldn't be listening. A dreamy expression so often came into his eyes when she chattered, and she would wonder what he was thinking of. Strange lands—or his ranch out west—or perhaps her mother?

"Where are we going?" she asked. "I really ought to dress for dinner, Daddy. You know what picnics are."

"Yes, To be sure. But I want to show you your graduation present."

"My present?" There was excitement in her tone; it was sure to be something wonderful—and unusual. All the girls were wild with envy when Kitty Clavering received a real pearl necklace from her father. All—except Linda. She had no desire for pearls, or for any jewelry, for that matter. She had known that her father's present would be much more thrilling. At least—if he didn't forget!

"You didn't think your old Dad would forget you, did you, Honey?" he asked.

"No—no—of course not. . . . But, Daddy, where is it? Why are we going out back of the house?"

"We have to walk over to our big field across the creek," he explained, mysteriously.

"The big field? Why? . . . That's a hot walk, Daddy. No shade at all! If you want a nice walk, we ought to go in the other direction, down towards the orchard, where there are some trees."

"Trees are the one thing we don't want," he

replied, solemnly. "You're going to hate trees, after you get my present, daughter."

"Hate—trees?" Linda's eyes were traveling all over the landscape, scanning it in vain for a clew. And then, as they mounted a slight incline, the thing came into sight. The marvelous, wonderful present! Too good to be true! Her heart stopped beating, her legs shook. She clutched at her father for support.

A beautiful, shining airplane! A superb Arrow Sport! The very kind she had been reading about, had been longing some day to possess! And even a hangar, to keep it in safety!

"Daddy!" she gasped, hoarsely.

He was watching her face, rapturously.

"You like it?"

"Oh!" she cried, wrapping her arms around his neck, and suddenly bursting into tears. "How could you know that I wanted it so much?"

He patted her hair, a little embarrassed by her emotion.

"I just tried to imagine what I would want most if I were your age. . . . You know, dear, you're your father's own girl! You look like your mother, but you're much more like me. . . . A strange mixture. . . ." He was talking

more to himself now, for Linda was almost running, pulling him along excitedly. "Feminine beauty—with masculine ambition. . . ."

But Linda was not listening. She had reached the plane now, and was walking around it, enthralled. Touching its smooth surface, to make sure that it was not only a dream. Dashing back to hug her father, and then climbing into the cockpit, to examine the controls, the instruments, the upholstery. If she lived to be a hundred years old, no other moment could hold greater happiness than this!

Her father smiled softly in satisfaction. He wanted her to have all the happiness that he had somehow missed. Money couldn't buy it for him; but money spent for his daughter could bring it to him in the only possible way now.

"You're not a bit afraid?" he asked, though he knew from her shining eyes that his question was unnecessary.

"Dad!"

"And now the question is, who can teach you to fly? Unfortunately, the man who brought it here for me couldn't stay, even to explain things to you—although of course there is a booklet. But I understand there's an air school here at Spring City. . . ."

"Yes! Yes!" she interrupted. "I've been

there—been up with one of the instructors. Can we drive over for him tonight?"

"My dear, you can't take a lesson at night," he reminded her. "You know that."

"Oh, of course not!" she agreed, laughing at her own folly. "But tomorrow?"

"Yes, certainly. At least we can see about it. You have to pass a physical examination first, I understand."

"And I want to take the regular commercial pilot's course, Daddy! I want to go to the bottom, and learn all about planes, and flying. May I?"

"I don't see why not. . . . You needn't stop for the expense."

Linda blushed; she hadn't been thinking of the expense—she never did. But perhaps she ought to now, for the plane must have cost a lot of money. At the present, however, something else was worrying her.

"It was the time I was thinking of," she admitted. "Aunt Emily wants to go away in a week or so. And oh, Dad, I just couldn't bear to leave this!" There were actually tears in her eyes.

"Of course not, dear. Well, we'll see if we can't compromise with your aunt. Stay at home the rest of June and July, be content with a

private pilot's license for the present, and then go away *in* your plane in August. Wouldn't that suit you?"

"To the ground—I mean to the skies!" corrected the happy girl.

"And now we must get back to dinner," he reminded her. "Aunt Emily's waiting."

Solemnly, tenderly, as a mother might kiss her baby, Linda leaned over and kissed the beautiful plane. Then giving her hand to her father, she walked back to the house with him in silence, knowing that now her greatest dream was fulfilled.

Chapter IV

Summer Plans

The news of Linda's magnificent present spread like wildfire. She never knew how it got about, for she didn't call anybody. In fact, she would have preferred to keep it a secret for that evening at least, and just spend her time over the booklet, talking things over with her father.

But of course the rest of the crowd couldn't understand that. These young people, who saw their parents every day of their lives, just couldn't believe that a normal fun-loving girl like Linda would prefer a father's society to theirs. They didn't know that Linda had always longed to know him better, to understand him, to talk over with him her greatest dreams and ambitions. Because there had been nobody to talk to in that intimate fashion. Aunt Emily never had understood her, and never would. The kind-hearted woman saw, of course, that her niece was pleased with her graduation present, but she could not realize the girl's over-

whelming joy in the possession of a plane. To her, even a string of imitation pearls would have been more desirable.

They talked their plans over at dinner, Linda's father taking her side in urging that the vacation be postponed until August.

"You don't mind, do you, Emily?" he asked his sister.

"Well, I can't say I don't mind," she replied, a little sharply. "But of course I wouldn't spoil Linda's fun. But I am wondering whether you have been wise, Tom. Linda is tired out; instead of going to school and learning some more, she ought to be resting. . . . But your presents have never shown a great deal of wisdom, I fear."

Her brother laughed.

"Sometimes it's better to be foolish," he remarked.

"Not if Linda breaks her neck!"

"Which she isn't going to do!" contradicted Mr. Carlton, confidently. "Linda's careful—and she's thorough. I know that, from the way she drives her car—and takes care of it."

"Cars and airplanes are different matters!"

"Not so different as you might think. In some ways, cars are more dangerous, because you

have to consider traffic—what the other fellow is going to do. And there's so much room in the skies!"

"But if something goes wrong—there's nobody there to help her," objected Miss Carlton.

"Well, Emily, you'd be amazed at the perfection of the airplanes they are putting out now-a-days. They're as different from the old-fashioned ones of the World War, as the first two-cylinder automobiles from the sixes and eights of today."

"But there still are a lot of crashes—and deaths," insisted his sister.

"That doesn't say Linda will crash! Linda is going to be a good pilot—learn it all thoroughly! . . . Why, Emily, you don't think I'd be willing to take any chances with my only child, do you—if I didn't consider it safe?"

He smiled fondly at Linda, but his sister drew down the corners of her mouth a trifle scornfully. As if his affection could compare with hers, though Linda wasn't her own child! He saw the girl two or three times a year at the most, while Aunt Emily was with her every day of her life!

"Well," she added, "I'm afraid you'll feel out of the crowd by the time August comes and they have been together all that time at Green Falls!"

"Do you mind missing it, my dear?" her father asked, gently.

"Not a bit!" replied Linda immediately, her eyes shining at the thought of what she was gaining.

Miss Carlton abruptly changed the subject.

"Do you remember a man named Clavering, Tom?" she asked.

"I remember the name. Connected with oil, wasn't he? Very wealthy?"

"A millionaire, I think," replied Miss Carlton, as if the news were the most important thing in the world. "Well, he has bought an estate just outside of Spring City, and his daughter has just graduated in Linda's class."

"Yes?" remarked her brother, wondering what possible difference that could make to him.

"Well, the Claverings are planning to spend the summer at Green Falls, on Lake Michigan —the resort that Mrs. Haydock and I have selected. . . . And there is a son in Harvard, who is going to be there."

"Yes?" It still didn't dawn on the man what his sister meant. Perhaps that was because he was not worldly, and money and position didn't mean much to him. Or perhaps it was because it had never occurred to him that his little Linda

was old enough to be thinking about getting married.

"You certainly are slow at comprehension at times, Tom," she said, "for a smart man. Do I have to tell you in so many words that young Ralph Clavering is interested in Linda?"

Linda blushed, and Mr. Carlton opened his eyes wide in amazement.

"Well! Well! Well!" he exclaimed.

"Dad!" protested Linda, nervously. "Don't be so serious! Aunt Emily thinks that because she loves me, everybody thinks I'm grand. But as a matter of fact, Ralph Clavering doesn't like me any better than half a dozen other girls. And I don't believe he likes me nearly so well as Louise—though I haven't given the matter any thought."

"How any boy could fall for Louise Haydock is more than I can see!" put in Miss Carlton. "She is a nice girl, but she has ruined what looks she had by cutting her hair off so short, and wearing those dreadful earrings all the time——"

"Aunt Emily!" interrupted Linda. "Please don't forget that Louise is my best friend!"

"Even so, I don't have to admire her appearance, do I?"

In a man's fashion, Mr. Carlton was getting very tired of this small talk. He stirred restlessly.

"Well, it's settled then, about the summer, isn't it?" he asked. "I'd like to drive over early tomorrow morning to this Flying School, and make the arrangements about your course. Because tomorrow night I'm taking the sleeper back to the ranch."

"Dad!" cried Linda, in disappointment. "You don't have to go that soon, do you? Oh, I wanted you to see me fly!"

"I'll be back again, as soon as I can. But just now I'm having trouble with some Mexicans who came over the border and have been threatening us. I've got to be on the job. My help aren't any too reliable."

"You won't be in any danger will you, Daddy?"

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Guess not," he replied.

At the conclusion of the meal, Miss Carlton, who always liked to have Linda's young friends about, suggested that she call some of them on the telephone and give them her news, inviting them over to celebrate with her. But Linda shook her head.

"There's only one person I'd like to tell about

it," she said, "and I'm afraid I couldn't reach him by phone, for I don't know where he lives. That's a boy over at the school, who has taken me up a couple of times."

But, as friends like this did not interest her, Miss Carlton dismissed the subject and went out to consult her cook. Linda's father, however, felt differently.

"What's his name?" he asked, indulgently. "Maybe we could locate him, if we put in a call at the school. There would probably be somebody about who would know his address."

"Ted Mackay," answered Linda.

Mr. Carlton's eyes narrowed suspiciously, and the smile died from his lips. His daughter trembled. What could he possibly have against Ted?

"What's the fellow look like?"

"He's big—with red hair, and blue eyes. Why? Do you know him, Daddy?"

"Think I know his father—to my sorrow. Same name—description fits, too. Likable chap, when you first meet him, isn't he? Looks honest and kind, and all that?"

"Oh yes, Daddy! And he is so nice, too. And so clever!"

"I don't doubt it. So is his father—in his own way. Well, if he's the son of the man I know,

you're to keep away from him. Do you understand, daughter?"

"Yes, but Daddy, don't you think it's only fair to give me a reason?" she pleaded.

"I'd rather not. Can't you take my judgment as worth something, Linda?" He spoke sternly.

The tears came to Linda's eyes, and she looked away.

"Mayn't I even speak to him?" she asked, finally.

"Oh, certainly. Never cut anybody—it's a sign of a little mind to stoop to such childishness. But don't be friendly with him. I dare say there are other instructors at the field, and I'll arrange for someone else to teach you."

The door-bell rang three times, but before the maid could answer it, Louise Haydock dashed into the house, followed by Kitty and Ralph Clavering, and finally, Maurice Stetson.

"Whoopee!" cried Ralph, almost running into Linda's father, who was standing in the dining-room doorway.

"Darling!" exclaimed Louise, embracing her chum excitedly. "We heard the news! Congratulations!"

"And naturally we couldn't wait to see your plane," added Kitty. "But are you sure you've finished dinner?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Linda, introducing her father to everybody except Louise, who of course knew him.

"If it only isn't too dark to see it!" exclaimed Louise. "We've all brought flashlights."

"Then we better trail out immediately," laughed Linda. "And I'll get Aunt Emily. She has only seen it from a distance."

"Better wait for the rest of the crowd," suggested Ralph. "I saw Dot trying to round up some more. They ought to be here any minute."

"Then we might as well wait. Aunt Emily'll be here in a minute."

"What kind of plane is it, Linda?" inquired Maurice. "You're 'Lindy' Junior now aren't you—just as I predicted," he added.

"It's a 'Pursuit,' " answered Linda, ignoring his second remark. "An Arrow Sport."

"Open cockpit?" asked Ralph.

"Yes. See—here's its picture." She waved the folder towards the boys. "It's supposed to be a wonderful little plane for a beginner!"

"From now on, Linda'll talk of nothing but joysticks and ailerons and—" began Maurice, but he was interrupted by the arrival of Dot Crowley and six other young people, all of whom had been packed in her small car.

It was just as she liked it to be, Aunt Emily

thought, as she joined the merry, singing group, and started out with them towards the field beyond the house. Mr. Carlton did not go with them this time, and later on, Linda had reason to be thankful for his absence.

It was quite dark now, but both the moon and the stars shone brightly, and the plane was clearly visible. The exclamations of delight and praise from her guests were enthusiastic enough to satisfy any proud owner of such a glorious prize. Linda was happier than ever.

The boys were naturally interested in the mechanics of the plane, the girls in the upholstery of the seats, the charming, deep cushions, which could be removed if it were necessary to use a parachute. They turned on their flashlights, and walked about the biplane, not a little in awe at the idea of Linda's piloting it through the skies.

"It only holds two people," remarked Dot, regretfully. "I wonder if we could pile in extras, like I do with my car."

"I'm afraid not." replied Linda. "But I can take everybody up in turn—after I get my license. I am hoping to bring it to Green Falls in August."

Satisfied at last that they had seen as much as possible for the present, they started to turn

back, when Maurice suddenly spied a lonely figure at the top of the incline, some fifty yards away.

"What ho!" he exclaimed. "Who can that be? Yo-ho-ho!" he cried, making a funnel with his hands.

"Not anybody in our crowd," replied Jim Valier, "or he would answer. Hope it isn't a thief—with designs on your new plane."

"We better chase him!" said Jackson Stiles, who was always ready for adventure. "Come on, fellows, let's rush him!"

The boys darted off, all except Jim Valier, who said gallantly that he had better stay as protection for the ladies, though of course everybody knew it was only because he was too lazy to run. The girls laughed and chattered while they were gone—all except Linda, who waited nervously to find out what success they had had.

In less than three minutes, however, they had returned, shamefacedly admitting defeat.

"Maybe the fellow couldn't sprint!" announced Ralph. "I'll bet he's a track-runner——"

"Or a chicken thief!" suggested Maurice.

"Do you think he is a tramp?" inquired Miss Carlton, relieved that the man had disappeared. Tramps were so dirty, so unpleasant!

"Don't think so. Big fellow—not badly dressed, as far as we could see. Had red hair."

"Too bad we couldn't catch him," remarked Maurice, always ready with his jokes, "for his hair was bright enough to light up the plane. We wouldn't have needed our flashes."

"Might have set the 'Pursuit' on fire!" suggested Jim.

Linda frowned uneasily. The description sounded like Ted Mackay. But how did he know that she had a plane, and if he had happened to see it, why didn't he come to the house, and ask her permission to examine it? After all, it was on their own property—nobody had any right to intrude. She thought darkly of what her father had said, and hoped that there wasn't anything crooked about Ted. Why, he seemed more of a friend to her than any of these people—except of course her Aunt Emily, and Louise!

By the time they had reached the house, everybody had forgotten the incident, for Louise turned on the radio, and without consulting Linda, they all decided to dance. Ralph claimed the latter for the first waltz.

"So this will make a change in your summer plans," he said, as if the idea were not wholly to his liking.

"Yes. We're not going to Green Falls till

August—maybe not then, if I don't succeed in getting a private pilot's license before that."

"But what about me?" he inquired, and the admiring look he gave her would have pleased Miss Carlton, had she noticed it.

Linda looked puzzled.

"You? Why—you'll never miss me! With all your girl friends!"

"No; I've decided I'm not going to miss you," he said, quietly. "Because I'm going to stay right here in Spring City, and learn to fly along with you!"

"What?"

"Yes. The thing fascinates me. I want a plane, too! I'm going to touch my Dad for one when I get home tonight!"

"But you've promised everybody you'll go to Green Falls!"

"So I will—August first!"

And so, much to Miss Carlton's delight, when the rest of the crowd left Spring City the following week, Ralph Clavering stayed at home with a couple of the servants, and enrolled at the same time as Linda, at the Spring City Flying School.

Chapter V

The First Lesson in Flying

Early the next morning, Linda wakened her father and hurried him through his breakfast. There wasn't a moment to be lost, she told him excitedly, like a child waiting to open her Christmas stocking. She had her car under the portico before he had finished his second cup of coffee.

"Don't drive so fast that you are killed on the way," cautioned her aunt. "Remember, dear, you have the rest of your life to fly that plane!"

But the present moment is the only time of importance to young people, and Linda scarcely took in what she was saying. Besides, the caution was unnecessary; unlike Dot Crowley and Maurice Stetson, she had too much respect for her car to mistreat it by careless driving. Linda loved her roadster as a cavalry general loves his horse.

"You want to do most of your learning on your own plane, don't you, daughter?" asked her father, as he sat down beside her. "I mean

—you'd rather bring your instructor back with us, and fly it, wouldn't you?"

"Of course, if that is possible. But don't you suppose I have to go in a class with others, Daddy?"

"Probably not—for it is a small school. Besides, I can arrange for you to have private lessons. It will hurry things up for you."

"Oh, thank you, Daddy! . . . But later, I want to go to a regular ground school, if you will let me." Her tone was as eager as any boy's, starting out on his life work. "And study airplane construction, and wireless—and—and——"

He smiled at her approvingly. What a girl!

"You are ambitious, my dear," he said, but there was pride in his words. "I don't see why not, though. . . . Only, not all at once. As your Aunt Emily reminded you, you have the rest of your life."

"I can't bear to fool!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "Now that I have graduated, I want to get somewhere."

"You're bound to—unless you fly in circles," he remarked, lightly.

"I mean—oh, you know what I mean, Daddy! And you do understand, don't you?"

"Well, not exactly. You don't expect to be

one of those independent girls who insist upon earning their own living, do you, dear?"

"I don't know. . . ." Somehow, she couldn't explain. Nobody understood just what she wanted except Ted Mackay, and that was because he had the same sort of goal himself. Ted Mackay! The memory of her father's command hurt her. Must she really give up his friendship? But why? She wanted to ask her father, but he was looking off in the distance, apparently lost in his own thoughts.

So she drove the remainder of the way in silence, absorbed by her own dreams.

The field was outside of Spring City, covering an area of thirty acres, and surrounded by the white fence that was now being used so much by airports. Three large hangars, containing probably half a dozen planes, occupied one side of the field, and, near the entrance was a large building, evidently used as an office and school for the theoretical part of the courses.

"You have been here before, Linda?" asked her father, as the girl locked her car.

"Yes—a couple of times. I feel almost at home."

Scarcely were they inside the grounds, when Ted Mackay, looking huge and handsome in his

flyer's suit, came out of the office building. He recognized Linda at once, and his blue eyes lighted up in a smile of welcome. Since he wore his helmet, his red hair was not visible, and Linda, glancing apprehensively at her father, knew that the latter had no idea who Ted was. But, nervous as she was over the meeting that was about to take place, she could not help feeling proud of Ted, and warmed by the frankness of his happy smile.

"Linda!" he cried. (She had called him Ted the second time she met him, so he reciprocated.) "I owe you an apology—and a confession!"

"Yes?" replied Linda, glancing fearfully at her father, though she knew that he had not yet realized who the young man was, or his expression would not have been so beneficent. "But first I want you to meet my father," she said. "Dad—this is Ted Mackay."

She was vexed at herself that she was actually stammering. Acting just like a child! Yet she couldn't forget how stern her father could be. She recalled the day that, as a child, she had sneaked off and played with Louise when her chum had whooping cough. Her father happened to come home—and announced that he would take care of her punishment. And what a

punishment! For three whole weeks he made her stay in the house, without a single companion except her Aunt Emily! He said he'd teach her to obey.

But he wasn't storming, or even frowning now. Merely looking politely indifferent, perhaps a trifle superior. He made no motion to shake hands with Ted.

"How do you do?" he said. "Would you be kind enough to take us to the man in charge of this field?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Ted.

Immediately, as if he intended to give the young people no chance for personal conversation, Mr. Carlton began to ask about the courses that were offered.

Ted answered his questions, explaining that Miss Carlton would probably want to become a private pilot at first.

"You have to pass a physical examination," he said, "and get a permit from the Government. Then you must have at least eighteen hours of flying experience—ten with someone else with you, eight of solo flying. There is a written examination, too—all about the rules and regulations that make up the laws of the air. Of course there isn't a lot of traffic, like with the driving of cars," he explained, smil-

ingly, "but you'd be surprised at how many rules there are!"

They had been crossing the field while he talked, and they stopped now at the main building. With a nod of dismissal that was curt, and yet not quite rude, for a muttered, "Thank you," accompanied it, Mr. Carlton left Ted, and took his daughter inside.

A middle-aged man, dressed in a khaki shirt and breeches, was seated at a desk. He looked up as they entered.

"My name is Carlton," began Linda's father, "and this is my daughter. I have bought her a plane, and I have come over to arrange about some lessons in flying."

Lieutenant Kingsberry, a former Army officer, asked them to be seated, and went over about the same explanation that Ted had given, saying that he would be delighted to register Linda, provided that she passed the physical examination.

"I suppose it is not so unusual now to have girls as students?" inquired Mr. Carlton.

"Not for many of the schools," replied the lieutenant. "But it just happens that we so far have not enrolled any of the fair sex. Your daughter will be the first. When does she wish to start?"

"As soon as possible," replied Mr. Carlton.

"Now!" Linda could not help adding.

"Well, I don't see why not," agreed the lieutenant, leniently. "At least Miss Carlton could take the physical examination, because one of our doctors is here now. And if she passes that, Mackay can give her the first lesson."

Linda's expression of delight suddenly died on her lips. For she glanced at her father, and saw the queer, drawn look about his mouth at the mention of Ted's name.

"This—Mackay—" he said slowly, "he isn't your only instructor?"

"He is our best."

"I prefer someone else. Can you arrange it?"

"Why—I suppose so. But if it is only personal reasons, I think you are making a mistake, Mr. Carlton. Mackay is our most reliable flyer—by far our best instructor. We don't expect to have him here more than a month or so. He's had a good offer from a big company."

Linda was glancing shyly, pleadingly, at her father, but he did not even see her.

"Unfortunately I found this young man's father to be most unreliable—untrustworthy—during the period that I employed him on my ranch. The fact is, we are not yet through with the trouble that he started. So you can under-

stand why I should refuse to trust my daughter to his son. It is an unpleasant but true fact that children inherit their father's weaknesses. I should not have a comfortable minute, being miles away, and knowing that she was in his hands."

"Of course I will accept your decision, Mr. Carlton," replied Lieutenant Kingsberry, "and see that your wishes are carried out. I will summon the second ranking instructor—H. B. Taylor."

He called his office boy, a young man learning to fly, and working his way at the same time, and gave the necessary message. A couple of minutes later the man came in, dressed like Ted, but somehow he seemed insignificant to Linda—as if he were the one who was not reliable. She sighed.

Her father remained with the lieutenant and the instructor while she went into the doctor's office for her physical examination. She knew that her eyesight was good, but she felt a little nervous when the doctor examined her heart. It was fluttering so! Suppose all the excitement had been too much for her—and she did not pass! What good would her lovely plane be to her, if she were never allowed to pilot it herself?

But she need not have been alarmed, for she

came through with flying colors. Then young Taylor took her over to one of the planes, and began to explain about the joystick, the rudder, the ailerons, and everything else he could think of, in words of one syllable.

Linda glanced at him, frowning. Did he think she was a baby. Or was it because she was a girl that his manner seemed so superior, so condescending? Why, he was wasting a lot of time! Ted would have had her up in the air by this time, perhaps letting her guide the plane herself.

"I am familiar with all these terms, Mr. Taylor," she interrupted. "You see I have been up twice—with Mr. Mackay. And I've read a couple of books."

The young man regarded her haughtily.

"It is necessary, Miss Carlton, that you go through the regular lessons, regardless of what you knew beforehand," he answered coldly. "And whatever Mr. Mackay may have shown you—as a friend—has nothing to do with these lessons, so long as I, not he, am your instructor."

"But I want to go up today!" she protested, eagerly.

"It is not our custom to take students up on the first day, Miss Carlton. . . . Now, have you a notebook and pencil?"

"In my car." She tried to answer naturally, but she was keenly disappointed.

"Then will you please go and get them," he said, seating himself in the cockpit of the plane which he had been using to illustrate his statements.

Obediently, but half-heartedly, Linda started back for the road where her car was parked. She had gone about half-way when she came upon her father, accompanied by Ralph Clavering, dressed like herself, in his riding outfit.

"Hello, Linda!" he cried. "Passed your physical exam, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes," she answered. "So you're really going to learn, too?"

"I most certainly am. And your father has consented to let us take our lessons together. Won't that be fun?"

"Linda," interrupted her father, as he saw her start away, "where are you going? I want to tell you something."

"Yes, Daddy?" A wild hope surged in her heart that perhaps he had changed his mind about Ted. It wasn't only that she had taken a dislike to H. B. Taylor—it was rather that she had not confidence in him as a teacher. He might be all right as a pilot, but instructing others was

a different matter. And he would never really feel any personal interest in her progress, or understand her, like Ted. His attitude almost said that he thought it was silly of girls to want to fly!

But she ought to have known her father better than to think he would change his mind.

"I should like to take your car and go home now, if you don't mind," he said, "because I have some work to do today that is urgent—some people to see about business. And Mr. Clavering has very kindly offered to drive you home. Is that all right? I know you don't like other people to run your car——"

"Oh, Daddy, you're different," she said, forcing a smile. "Of course I don't mind your driving it. . . . But I'm sorry you can't wait for us."

Promising to meet Ralph in a couple of minutes, she walked out to the entrance of the field with her father.

"I need not tell you, dear," he said, "that my decision about Mackay is final. And I want you to have as little to do with him as possible, while you are here. It's for your own good, daughter. I can see that girls might find the young man attractive. But it is well to steer

clear of such people. Have all the fun you like with your own friends."

"Yes, Daddy," she managed to reply.

"I guess young Clavering will see to it that your time at home, after most of the others go away for the summer, is not dull. And if you pass your course and get your license, you can fly your plane to Green Falls. I will make arrangements about a place to keep it. I dare say they have maps at the school."

"Yes—and thank you so much—for everything, Daddy," she said. She mustn't let him see that she was disappointed, after all he had done for her! He might be right about Ted—but she didn't think so. Whatever Ted's father might be, she felt sure that Ted was one of the finest young Americans that she had ever known.

Securing her notebook, and handing over her keys to her father, she hurried back to the field, and finished her lesson with Ralph at her side. As they walked out together, she looked about shyly for Ted. It wouldn't do any harm for her just to speak to him; after all he did want to tell her something. At last she spotted him, across the field beside one of the planes—in overalls and jumper now, his red hair brilliant in the sunlight.

"Do you know I believe that's the fellow we chased last night!" exclaimed Ralph. "Do you know him?"

"Yes, I've met him. He took me up a couple of times."

"You know him? Then why was he sneaking around so funny last night? Why didn't he come over and speak to you?"

"He's shy," replied Linda, jumping to the only conclusion that seemed feasible, and her explanation must have been correct, for Ted never looked up from his work as the young couple passed.

Chapter VI

Winning Her License

The next few weeks were the most interesting, the most exciting, of Linda's whole life. Every day she drove over to the Flying School with Ralph, and gained first her theoretical, and then her practical knowledge.

Both she and Ralph were surprised to find that it was so simple a matter to handle a plane. By the middle of July they were accustomed to stepping into the cockpits by themselves, nosing their planes into the wind, and rising to a height of fifteen hundred feet, without even a tremor. Anxiously they counted their hours of solo flying, not only that their licenses would be approved, but because they both wanted to try some stunts. They had studied the principles of loops, Immelman turns, barrel rolls, and falling leaves, and they were wild to try them out for themselves.

Finally, after they had both passed their written examinations, and were only waiting for their licenses to come through, Mr. Taylor

allowed them both to try an inside loop and an Immelman turn. Linda's happiness was so great that she felt she just had to tell somebody, so she went home and wrote to her father. Unfortunately, she thought it wiser to say nothing about stunts to her aunt.

Miss Carlton still insisted that she would never get into a plane, not even Linda's. "It's too dangerous," she objected, when her niece was begging her to go for a ride. "I might be killed—and then who would take care of you? And besides, I don't see how anybody could learn to fly in the short time you've been at it."

"But Aunt Emily," explained Linda patiently, "it really is easier than driving a car. Once you are off the ground, the plane practically flies itself. And the higher you are, the safer."

Miss Carlton shuddered.

"I can't believe that, dear. Because the higher you are, the farther you have to fall!"

"But you have all that chance to regain control of your plane," insisted her niece. "Crashes practically always come on the ground—it's very rare indeed that two planes crash in the air, even when they are flying in Army formation."

"How soon do you think you'll get your

license?" inquired Miss Carlton, showing that Linda's words had made no impression at all upon her. She was anxious to get away now; Spring City was becoming very hot.

"Any time now," replied the girl, her eyes shining with anticipation. "I have done all the required solo flying—and more too."

"Solo flying? Do you mean you've been up alone? Without even Ralph?"

"Yes, of course! And I love it, Aunt Emily! Oh, if you could just try it once, you'd never be afraid again. It is the most wonderful sensation—up in the skies, all alone! Free as a bird!" She paused abruptly, smiling at her own enthusiasm. She did not often talk like this to anybody, though there was a great deal of poetry in her make-up.

"Well, dear, I'm glad you like it," said Miss Carlton, in a matter-of-fact tone. "But don't overdo it. And don't go in for any stunts."

Ralph Clavering, who had been making it his habit to come over to see Linda every evening, now that all his other friends had gone away, arrived on the porch in time to hear Miss Carlton's admonition. He was about to say something, for he was very proud of his successful "acrobatic flying," when he caught Linda's frown of warning. Of course there was no use

of worrying the timid woman, who was worried enough already.

He sat on the railing, dangling his legs, and carelessly lighting a cigarette, as if he were very much at home.

"Linda's little 'Pursuit' is a daisy, Miss Carlton," he said. "It really has a most marvelous motor—and all sorts of safety devices. There's not a thing for you to worry about. . . . I wish I had one like it!"

Linda regarded him sympathetically. It was hard luck that his father, with all his money, refused to buy Ralph a plane! But he had been promised one the following year—if he graduated from college without any conditions. Evidently Mr. Clavering was using it as a spur to his son's ambition, for Ralph had never been keen about his studies. Good times came first with him; besides, he argued, what was the use of learning to make money, when his father already had more than they could spend?

"What are you children going to do this evening?" asked Miss Carlton, though it was nine o'clock now, and there wouldn't be much evening left, for Linda insisted upon going to bed early.

"I'd like to map out our trip to Green Falls," the latter replied. "And then we could show

our plan to Lieutenant Kingsberry, and see where the airports are located along the way, in case we have to land."

"Why not Taylor?" inquired Ralph, teasingly, for he knew that Linda did not care much about her instructor.

She gave the boy a withering look.

"Well, then—Redhead? He ought to know. By the way, I never see you talking to him, Linda!"

"I never get a chance. He's always busy, and besides, you're usually with me. I guess he's too shy to intrude."

Nevertheless, she decided that she must have one talk with Ted Mackay before she left the school, to clear up matters that had never been discussed. All during the next week she watched for her opportunity, but it did not come until her final day at the school—the day when she received her license as a private pilot.

Wild with joy at her success, she asked where Ted was, and ran over to the hangar where he happened to be working. For once, Ralph was not with her; he had not yet landed the plane he had been flying.

"Mr. Mackay!" she cried joyously—she was afraid to call him "Ted" now, for he seemed like such a stranger. "I'm a real pilot! I can

fly my own plane now, wherever I want to go!"

The young man came over solemnly and shook hands with her.

"May I be the first to congratulate you?" he asked.

"Not the first. Lieutenant Kingsberry has done so already. But, of course, in a way he doesn't count."

"And this is only your beginning, I know!" he said, his blue eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. "You're going to a ground school in the fall—as we used to talk about—aren't you?"

"Yes, I hope so." She hesitated, and looked down at the ground, digging the toe of a dainty slipper—entirely feminine, in spite of her flyer's costume—into the dust. She felt shy, and embarrassed; it was so hard to hurt Ted, and yet she didn't dare disobey her father. "Ted," she said, finally, "could I have just one little talk with you, to clear things up—before I go away?"

"I've been longing for it," he confessed, eagerly. "But I'd decided that you were through with me, on account of my actions that night you got your plane—when I sneaked over to see it. One of the boys heard it roaring over our heads, and ran out to see where it was landing. So, when he came back with the news

that it was in your field, I knew it must be yours. When I went over to see it myself—I—I was hoping you'd come out alone—and we could gloat over it together! And then all that crowd showed up, and your aunt too—I was sure it was she—and I just lost my nerve and ran. It looked pretty queer, I guess."

"No, only why didn't you come to the house first?" she inquired.

"I was afraid the butler would say, 'Miss Carlton is not at home'—the way the rich young ladies' butlers always do in the novels."

"Only we haven't any butler," laughed Linda.

"Well, you have a strict aunt—and a father that's made of steel!"

"Don't!" cried the girl, in an offended tone. "You mustn't say a word against my father, or I never will talk to you. But that brings me to what I wanted to say. . . . My father has no time for you, on account of your father. It seems that a man by the same name worked for him on the ranch in Texas—and was untrustworthy. Could that have been your father?"

"I'm afraid it was," admitted Ted, sadly.

"So you see why he selected Mr. Taylor to teach me to fly. . . ." Tears almost came into her eyes, as she saw how sorrowful Ted was

looking. "I think it's absurd, myself," she admitted. "But I suppose Daddy means it for the best. . . . I'm—not to be friends with you, Ted. . . . And, oh, I'm so sorry!"

"I'm sorry too, Linda," the boy said slowly. "But somehow I never believed we could be real friends. I'm not like you—I don't believe in fairy stories."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the poor young man, who has a disgrace to live down, isn't likely to be friends with the rich, beautiful girl—in real life. . . . So I guess it's good-by. . . ." He held out his hand.

"Oh, but I'll at least see you again!" she protested. "Tomorrow I'm going to fly my plane over here and back—all by myself!"

"That's wonderful—I wish I could be here to see you do it," he answered regretfully. "But unfortunately I am leaving myself tomorrow. I'm taking a job as salesman for a plane construction company in Kansas City."

"Congratulations!" cried Linda, pleased at his advancement. "Well, good luck—and good-by!"

"And, by the way," he added, "I want to thank you for wearing my poor little flowers at your class-day. I saw you—through the fence.

I was so glad they held the affair out-of-doors!"

"Then they were from you?" she asked, ashamed that she had forgotten to thank him. "I thought so, but I wasn't sure. I meant to ask you. They were lovely."

"I am going to give you a card of my firm," said Ted, reaching into his pocket. "So that you will know where I am, in case you need any help with your Arrow. . . . You—you—don't mind?"

"I'll be very thankful to have it," she reassured him. "You know, Ted, I have an awful lot of confidence in you!"

And, with a final pressure of her hand, he turned to go, and she, looking about, saw Ralph Clavering walking towards her.

"What's the big idea?" he asked her, when he reached her side, and Ted had disappeared. "Holding hands with Red?" His tone was irritable.

"I was just saying good-by," she explained. "He's leaving tomorrow for a job in Kansas City."

"Flying?"

"Naturally."

"Well, we'll be flying away soon, too," he added, more cheerfully. "I had a letter from Kit this morning, and she wants us surely at

Green Falls for July thirty-first. It's the Midsummer Ball, and the big event of the season—socially. She told me to tell you and Miss Carlton to be sure not to miss it."

"Oh, I'll be ready by Saturday," replied Linda. "Aunt Emily has been doing all the shopping, so I hardly need to do anything. . . . By the way, did Kit give you any gossip about the crowd?"

"Let me see," muttered Ralph, as he took her arm possessively while they walked across the field, in the hope that Ted Mackay would see them. "She did have quite a bit to say—but it was mostly about Maurry."

"Maurice Stetson? What's he been doing?"

"Rushing Kit, evidently. And she seems to like it. . . . And she said Harry Smith has a life-guard's job, and is spending all his spare time with Lou."

"I haven't heard from Lou in ages," remarked Linda. "But I guess it's partly my fault. I haven't had time to answer her letters." Then, changing the subject, as they came out to the road where Linda's car was parked, "You're going to fly up with me in the 'Pursuit,' aren't you, Ralph?"

"Surest thing! We'll fly everywhere to-

gether—from now on. Just like Mr. and Mrs. Lindy!"

"Only we won't!" she answered abruptly, laughing at him.

As they stepped up to the roadster, they almost fell over a man who came out from a shabby coupé in front of theirs. He had evidently been leaning over, fixing something.

"Want any help?" asked Ralph, though Linda knew he hadn't the slightest idea of giving any.

"No, thanks," muttered the man, without looking up. "Engine trouble."

"Engine trouble!" repeated Linda, sympathetically. Then, turning to Ralph. "Suppose something like that should happen to us—on the way to Green Falls!"

"Well, it won't!" replied Ralph reassuringly. "The motor's just about perfect in that little plane of yours! No—but I tell you what, Linda, you better bring your gun along. That crazy sister of mine expects me to bring her pearls up for the Midsummer Ball!"

"Real pearls—at a summer resort!" cried Linda, as she slipped the key into her lock, and started her engine. "She's taking an awful chance!"

"That's what I think. But of course they're insured. And so long as she's succeeded in getting Dad's permission, it's not my business to stop her. . . . By the way, it's a fancy-dress affair. What sort of costume will you wear?"

"I don't know. I guess I'll leave it to Aunt Emily."

But when she got back home, she forgot all about pearls and dresses and midsummer balls. Nothing mattered to her, but the glorious fact that at last she was a real flyer!

Chapter VII

The Flight to Green Falls

The first thing that Linda thought of when she opened her eyes the following morning was the glorious fact that she was now a real pilot. She could take her plane anywhere—to Green Falls, to her father's ranch in Texas, wherever she wanted to go—and nobody could stop her. The freedom of the world and of the skies was hers.

But she had no intention of taking it any farther than the Spring City Flying School that day. She would spend the morning there, watching one of the licensed mechanics give it a thorough inspection, in readiness for the flight to Green Falls on the following day.

She wished that it might be Ted Mackay who would go over the plane. She had such confidence in his knowledge, his thoroughness. Besides, it would be fun to spend the morning with him, asking him questions, and talking things over.

Naturally, that was impossible. When Linda

reached the field she found that Ted already had gone, and a number of changes had been made. H. B. Taylor was now first-ranking instructor, and the young man who had been acting as office boy, or orderly, or whatever they chose to call him, had passed his course and was promoted to the rank of instructor. Another man took his place—an older man this time, and Linda thought probably it was the poor fellow who had been having engine trouble with his shabby coupé the preceding day. Everything seemed different, and Linda was somehow glad that she was leaving. The place would never be the same to her without Ted Mackay.

About noon she received the mechanic's O.K. upon her plane, and flew home in time for lunch. Her aunt had finished packing, and was as excited as a child about going to Green Falls, and again taking up their customary social life among their friends.

"I have bought a new flying suit for you, dear," she said to her niece, as the girl entered the library. "Unwrap it and see how you like it."

Linda eagerly unfastened the strings and lifted out a pair of white flannel knickers, with a jaunty blue sweater and helmet of knitted silk, just the color of her eyes. The whole costume

was charming, and a lovely change from the dark riding breeches she had been using for flying.

"It's perfect, Aunt Emily!" she cried, realizing for the first time that she had never cared for what she was now wearing. "And it was so sweet of you to think of getting it for me!"

"I never could see why girls have to look masculine," replied her aunt. "Of course I can understand that skirts are impractical, but they make these suits so pretty now-a-days. And I want you to look nice the very first minute you arrive at Green Falls. First impressions are always so important and there is sure to be a crowd there to greet you."

Linda was only too delighted to wear it the next day, which dawned clear and warm for her flight. Miss Carlton left early in the morning, by train, so that she would be at Green Falls in plenty of time to welcome the flyers.

Ralph came over for Linda about half-past nine. Carrying their lunch, the young people started on their first real adventure in the air.

The young man, too, wore a new suit of spotless white flannel, and, as they walked, tall and slender and straight, they made perhaps the best-looking pair of flyers in America. But neither was conscious of that; both were too

much excited about their first trip in the air to give even a passing thought to their appearances.

"Are you sure that you have the precious necklace?" asked Linda, as they made their way across the field in back of her house.

"Yes, indeed," answered Ralph. "I went to the safe-deposit vault this morning to get it. That was one reason why I didn't want to start early. I had to wait for the bank to open."

"Kit would be horribly disappointed if we didn't bring it," returned Linda. "I honestly think she loves those pearls as much as I do my 'Pursuit'!"

"Queer taste," remarked the boy. "If I had them, I'd sell them and buy a biplane!"

"Of course you would," said Linda approvingly. "Even if you do insist upon talking baby-talk!"

"Baby-talk?"

"Certainly. 'Buy a biplane'—sounds like 'Bye, Bye, Baby,' doesn't it?"

Ralph smiled, but they both forgot immediately what they were saying, for they were beside the plane now, ready to start on their flight. Linda was not at all nervous about the journey, only thrilled and happy. She climbed into the cockpit with the same assurance that

she entered her car, and her take-off was just as easy, just as natural. It seemed now as if she piloted the biplane by instinct; with the sureness of a bird it rose into the air to a gradual height of fifteen hundred feet. For she had been cautioned again and again that there was safety in height.

They flew along without any attempt at conversation, for it was difficult to hear above the roar of the motor. But Linda was so happy that she hummed softly to herself, and most of the time she was smiling. Ralph, with a map in his lap, kept a close watch on the compass.

For some time they did not see any other planes in the sky, and then at last one came into view. As it drew closer, it occurred to Linda to wonder whether she was being followed.

"Who do you suppose that is?" shouted Ralph, above the noise of the motor.

"I think it's somebody from our school—maybe Taylor," she replied. "Perhaps Dad ordered them to follow us—for safety—or maybe it was Ted Mackay's idea."

As the plane drifted off to one side, they thought no more about the matter. But it was noon now; the sun stood high overhead, and both of the young people were astonished to find how hungry they were.

"I want to try a couple of stunts before we eat," Linda told Ralph. "You're game, aren't you?"

"Surest thing!" replied the boy, with delight. "We've got plenty of height—and a spectator too, for that matter." The other plane had just come back into sight.

Linda's eyes were shining with excitement, yet inside she was perfectly cool. Hadn't she made inside loops and Immelman turns often at school, and didn't she know exactly what to do? With perfect poise, she swung the plane into a loop, and completed it without any difficulty. Pleased with her success, she tried it again and again.

"You must think you're Laura Ingalls!" shouted Ralph, catching his breath. "Trying to beat her record?"

"Hardly," smiled Linda, for the famous aviatrix he mentioned held the record at that time with nine hundred and eighty consecutive inside loops, at a speed of four and a half loops a minute.

The plane was righted now, but Linda suddenly noticed that Ralph was acting awfully queer, hanging over the side, and hunting frantically in the pockets of the sweater which

he had put over the seat. She believed he must be ill; certainly his face was ghastly white.

"Ralph!" she cried, fearfully. "What's the matter?"

"I've lost the necklace!" he screamed in terror. "Must have fallen out of my pocket!"

"Oh!" wailed Linda, aghast at the meaning of his words. "Are you sure?"

"Positive!"

"Then we'll land immediately. We're over a field, so we ought to be able to find it. Now—keep your eye on the compass!"

Gradually, and with easy skill, she turned the biplane into the wind and descended, finally coming down into a large flat field, evidently a pasture ground for some horses. Ralph was the first to jump out.

"We went a little south to land," he said, "so it must have dropped up there."

"Was it in a box?" questioned Linda.

"Yes, fortunately. A white velvet box, inside a larger pasteboard one, with three rubber bands around it. That ought to make it easier to find."

Linda, however, had her doubts; the field was so big! Besides, what proof had Ralph that he had lost it at that particular minute—when she

was making her loops. She remembered that he had taken off his sweater an hour ago, when he felt too warm, and had carelessly hung it over the side, forgetful of the precious box in its pocket. That was the trouble with being so rich! Many times she had noticed how heedless both Kitty and Ralph were about valuables.

They walked silently across the field, their eyes on the ground, their minds filled with remorse. Ten minutes passed, and they had not found it.

"Let's go back and eat our lunch," suggested Ralph, consulting his watch. "It's almost one o'clock, and we'll feel better if we eat. After all, we have plenty of time—Green Falls is only about twenty miles farther. We could search all afternoon, if necessary."

"Yes, only Aunt Emily would nearly die of anxiety. She'd be sure we had been killed, if we didn't arrive before supper."

They went back to the plane and took out the dainty lunch which Miss Carlton's cook had packed that morning for them. But, hungry though they were, the meal was not the pleasant picnic they had been hoping for. Both were too unhappy to enjoy what they were eating.

Presently the noise of a motor overhead attracted their attention, and, looking up, they

saw a plane in descent. When it was low enough to identify, they knew that it was the one that had been following them.

"It's the 'Waco' from our school!" cried Linda. "I recognize it now. He must think we're in trouble. I wonder who's piloting?"

The plane made a rather poor landing at the far end of the field, perhaps half a mile away. They could distinguish a man getting out of the cockpit, but of course at that distance they could not identify him. However, he seemed to be coming slowly towards them.

As he advanced nearer and nearer Linda noticed that he wore an ordinary suit of clothing—not a flyer's uniform, and he kept his hand in his pocket. But she still did not recognize him—unless he was that new man the school had taken on the preceding day. Once he stooped over, as if he were picking something up, and Linda's heart beat wildly with hope. Could it be that he had found the necklace? Apparently, though, it was only a plant that he had pulled up by the roots, for when he straightened himself, he seemed to be examining its leaves.

"In trouble?" he shouted, as soon as he was within hearing distance.

Ralph jumped up and ran towards him, shaking his head in the negative.

"No trouble with the plane," he replied. "But we've lost a little box—with a necklace in it. You haven't seen it, have you?"

"Why, yes," answered the man slowly, "I did pick up a box." And he put his other hand in his pocket, and drew out the very article. Fortunately it had not been broken; even the rubber bands were still tightly around it. He handed it to Ralph.

"Oh, thank you a thousand times!" cried Linda, too relieved to believe her eyes. "The necklace was a graduation present to this man's sister, and she values it very highly!"

"Well, if that's all, I'll be off," said the man, as he watched Ralph put the box into his pocket.

"No, I must reward you," insisted the boy, taking out a twenty-dollar bill. "And by the way, you're from the Spring City Flying School, aren't you? We recognized the plane."

The other nodded, and seemed in a hurry to be off. Already he was twenty feet away.

"It was awfully nice of you to follow us, and look after us," called Linda, "but really we don't need protection. We're getting along finely!"

But the man was running now, and could hardly have heard what Linda was saying. In a couple of minutes they heard the motor start,

and with a clumsy take-off, the plane ascended.

"A queer cuss," remarked Ralph. "And I can't see that he's much of a flyer. You and I are both better—by a long shot. . . . But anyhow, we've got the necklace!" He put his arms around Linda and hugged her, and she was too happy to protest. What a miracle it was to have found it!

"That will teach me a lesson," said Ralph, as he helped Linda gather up the lunch. "I'm going to be more careful now. I've put the necklace in my most inside pocket!"

"And I'm not going in for any more acrobatics for a while," added Linda.

They climbed into the cockpit, and started the motor without wasting any more time. Half an hour later they made a graceful landing at Green Falls' Airport, for a group of a hundred spectators to witness and admire.

Chapter VIII

The Robbery

"Let's don't say anything about our little mishap," whispered Linda, as the flying couple got out of their plane. "For one thing, I'd just as soon not boast about stunts in front of Aunt Emily. She would be worried all the more."

"And I'm not any too proud of the fact that I was so careless about a valuable necklace," returned Ralph. "So we'll keep it our secret."

There was no time for further words. Everybody rushed at them, shouting joyous welcomes. Louise was the first to kiss Linda—then all the others, and finally her aunt.

"Thank Heaven you're safe!" cried the latter. "I couldn't eat a bite of lunch, I was so uneasy."

"Of course we're safe," assured Ralph. "And maybe if we'd come by motor, we should have had an accident. There was a big smash-up—two automobiles—outside of Spring City this morning."

"Isn't the air up here wonderful!" exclaimed

Miss Carlton. "After that stuffy town of ours!"

"I think the *airport* is wonderful," replied Linda, "for so small a place. But as for the air—well, don't forget Auntie dear, that Ralph and I have been having marvelous air—up in the skies!"

"Hope you didn't give him the air," remarked Maurice Stetson, solemnly.

Kitty Clavering gave the young man a withering look, and inquired of the flyers when they might hope for rides. "Oh, I don't mean today," she added, "for I know you must both be nearly dead."

"Not a bit of it!" denied Linda, who still looked as fresh as a flower in her becoming blue and white suit. "But it's supposed to be wise to have a mechanic go over your plane each time you fly. Just a precaution, you see."

"A very good rule to follow," commented Miss Carlton. "Now everybody get into their cars, and we'll go over to our bungalow for some ginger-ale and sandwiches."

"Just a moment, please!" interrupted a voice at her elbow, and everyone turned to see a newspaper man with a camera. "Pictures, please!"

Linda and Ralph smilingly agreed, and their friends stepped aside. Then they all piled into

the three machines that were waiting for them, while the strangers who had been watching commented on the beautiful biplane, and the handsome couple who had been flying it, and wondered whether they were married.

"Did you bring my necklace, Ralph?" asked Kitty Clavering, as he got into her roadster with her and Maurice.

"Surest thing!" he replied, as if nothing at all had happened on the way. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the pasteboard box, with the French jeweler's name engraved on the lid.

"Thanks a lot," she replied. "Maurry, you take care of it till we get home, so long as you're sitting in the middle. Mind you don't lose it! I think as much of that as Linda does of her plane."

"But not as much of it as you do of me?" asked the youth, flippantly.

"A thousand times more! Like the old question people always ask married men: 'If your mother and your wife were drowning, which one would you save?' Well, if you and the necklace were drowning, I'd go after my necklace!"

"Righto. Necklaces, no matter how valuable, have never been known to swim. I do."

It was only a five minute ride from the airport to Miss Carlton's bungalow, so Kitty

waited until they had all gone inside the pleasant living-room to open her box, and gaze at her beloved treasure once more.

"I'm dying to see it again," she said, as she took the box from Maurice's hand. "If I had my way, I wouldn't keep it in a safe-deposit vault. I like it where I can look at it."

She took off the rubber bands and opened the box, displaying the velvet case inside. But when she unfastened the clasp, her expression of delight changed abruptly to one of horror. The case was empty!

Her exclamation of distress was pitiful to hear. Her dearest possession—gone!

"Ralph!" she cried with torturing accusation. "Ralph! Are you teasing me?"

Her brother's face became ghastly white.

"What—what's wrong—Kit?" he stammered.

"My necklace! Oh, what has happened?" She burst out crying.

Everybody crowded around and gazed in consternation at the empty box, looking questioningly at Ralph, to see whether it could possibly be intended as a joke. But he did not need to tell them of his innocence; he looked almost as stricken as his sister. He knew now that it had been stolen by the man who pretended to

be a pilot! And he had actually made twenty dollars out of Ralph besides, for the transaction! What fools they had been, never to open the box!

"It's all my fault!" cried Linda, contritely. "My silly, foolish, childishness, for wanting to show off!"

Nobody of course had any idea what she was talking about—nobody except Ralph.

"No! No! It was mine!" he protested. "My carelessness!"

"Then you both knew!" exclaimed Kitty, raising her head, which she had buried on Linda's shoulder while she sobbed. "Oh, how cruel, not to prepare me!"

"On my honor, we didn't!" averred Ralph, and from the look on his face, his sister knew that he was telling the truth.

"Explain what you meant, then," she commanded.

"Let me tell you," put in Linda. "But sit down, Kit dear. You're liable to faint. . . . You see, we were robbed, and too foolish to suspect it. We even paid the robber twenty dollars for doing the job."

"So you said," Kitty remarked, impatiently. "Do you mean that you saw somebody take it —right under your eyes?" She had dropped

down on the couch, and her pale little face was pitiful to see. The tears still ran down her cheeks, washing tiny rivers through the powder. Luckily she was not a girl who used rouge, or she would have looked ridiculous. As it was, she gave the appearance of a very unhappy child.

"Exactly!" explained Linda. "Or rather, we might have, if we had had sense enough to realize it. I wanted to try a couple of loops, and we started quite high, but by the time we had finished, we were over an open field. It was then that Ralph suddenly realized that the box had dropped out of his pocket when the plane was on its side. So we decided to land, and search the field."

"And somebody had already picked it up?" demanded Dot, excitedly.

"No. Another airplane—I had noticed it before—landed soon after we came down. The pilot walked over and asked us if we were in trouble."

"And you stupids told him all about the fifty-thousand-dollar necklace!" cried Louise, in disgust.

"No, we didn't! We were smart enough to know that wouldn't be wise. We thought we knew him, though—we had seen him at the

Spring City Flying School. But we did tell him we had lost a necklace, and he said he had picked something up. As a matter of fact, we had noticed him stoop over."

"And you took it and thanked him, and never looked inside!" cried Kitty.

"I'm afraid you're right," admitted Ralph. "We thought he was a friend, following us for our protection, at the orders of the school."

"Well, then, why was he following you?" demanded Kitty, incedulously.

"He must have overheard us talking about the necklace," answered Linda slowly, for she was trying to think the thing out. "Yes—that is what I believe he was doing all the time, Ralph. Now I remember—the day we got our licenses!"

"You mean you went around the school shouting the news that you were carrying pearls to Green Falls in an airplane?" asked the unhappy girl.

"Of course not! Only the men at the bank —the safe-deposit vault—really knew about it. And of course they're absolutely trustworthy! Except maybe this one man—who was fixing his car outside the aviation field. We never thought he was listening—why we couldn't even see him!"

"Children," interrupted Miss Carlton, who had been patiently waiting to serve the refreshments, "wouldn't you all feel better if you ate something? Then we can discuss what are the best steps to take to capture the thief."

They agreed, but Linda and Ralph and Kitty were all extremely nervous; they hated to lose any time. Ralph decided to telephone to a lawyer at once in Spring City, to put expert detectives on the job, and to get in touch with the Flying School.

"Lucky the necklace was insured," remarked Maurice Stetson, as he drank his ginger-ale.

"Yes, but Dad will never get me another!" moaned Kitty, disconsolately. "He'll say I was careless, and invest the insurance in bonds, to be kept in trust till I'm older—or something like that." She started to cry afresh. "And I only wore the necklace twice—at graduation and at the class dance!"

Linda watched her sorrow with more than sympathy—with remorse. It was her fault, she was sure! Of course she couldn't imagine caring so much for a pearl necklace, when such lovely imitations were made, but it wasn't her place to judge. Kitty probably wouldn't understand why she loved her Arrow so much.

Slowly, painfully, she came to her decision.

She rose and went over to the couch where Kitty was sitting, and crowded in between the latter and Dot.

"It's my fault, Kit," she said, "and of course I can't pay for it—but I can help. I'm—I'm—going to sell my airplane, and—give you the money. Then you can start buying a new one—a couple of pearls at a time."

Kitty squeezed her hand affectionately.

"You're a dear, Linda, but I couldn't possibly let you do that. Besides, it was really Ralph's fault."

"Of course it was!" put in the young man, returning from making his telephone call. "But we're going to catch that thief!" he announced, with conviction. "I've just been talking with Lieutenant Kingsberry at the field, and he says that fellow didn't even have a license, that they only took him on temporarily, as sort of errand boy. And he deliberately stole that plane!"

"I thought he was about the poorest pilot I ever saw!" cried Linda, jumping up excitedly at this piece of news. "He'll probably crash, sooner or later. . . . Ralph!" Her eyes were shining with inspiration. . . . "Let's go out after him—ourselves!"

"Lieutenant Kingsberry is broadcasting the news all over—to all the airports," replied the young man. "Everybody will be watching for him. Do you think there would be any use in our going?"

"Yes! Yes! We might be just the ones to spot him! Oh, come on!"

"But haven't you had enough flying for today, Linda?" inquired Miss Carlton, anxiously.

"We won't go far, Auntie dear," answered the girl. "Just around to the nearest airports, and see if anybody has any information. The practice of landing and taking-off again will be good for us both. . . . And you needn't worry one bit! . . . Now, who'll drive us over to our 'Pursuit'?"

"'Pursuit' is right," remarked Maurice. "Your plane has the right name, Linda!"

Louise immediately offered her services, and in less than five minutes the young pilots had washed their faces and were ready to start. Ten minutes later they climbed into the cockpit on the runway of the airport, and, this time with Ralph at the controls, they took off for the nearest airport.

Ralph was delighted to be piloting a plane again, and in his enthusiasm he almost for-

got the seriousness of his mission. A king of the air, he thought, and his lips were smiling. But Linda could not forget so easily.

Like most young men, he loved going fast, and as soon as he was high enough, he let the plane out to her maximum speed. Over the clouds they sailed, at a rate of seventy miles an hour, yet they did not seem to be traveling fast. Linda had no sense of danger, yet it was the first flight she had ever made that she did not thoroughly enjoy, for, unlike Ralph, she could not for one moment forget Kitty's tragedy.

Twenty minutes, however, was all that was needed to reach their first port, and Ralph, not quite so skilled or so careful as Linda, made, nevertheless a pretty landing. It was a large field, evidently designed for amateur sport flyers, and there were a number of licensed mechanics in readiness to greet new arrivals.

Ralph lost no time in telling his story to the first man who came forward. Had they any information so far? he inquired.

"Only of a wreck about fifteen miles away," replied the latter. "That may be your man—if, as you say, he is not an experienced pilot."

"Can you give us directions?" put in Linda excitedly.

"Certainly," replied the other, taking a map from his pocket, and indicating the position of the wreck. "We've already sent a doctor and a nurse—and telephoned for an ambulance." Marking the spot, he handed the map to Ralph.

Jumping into the plane at once, Linda took control, for she felt surer of herself than of her companion in an emergency. The boy was so absent-minded, so likely to forget things in his excitement.

Their destination was a field again, but not a large one, this time, and already a small crowd, gathered from passing automobiles, had collected. Here landing was not so easy as in the airports designed for that very purpose. But the girl knew just what she was doing, and she handled the situation with a dexterity that would have brought credit to a far more experienced pilot.

Over against an embankment, its wings smashed to pieces, a plane was lying on its side, mutely testifying to the truth of the mechanic's statement.

"There's the wreck!" cried Ralph, as he and Linda stepped on the ground. "Do you think it's the Waco?"

Grabbing her companion's arm, Linda ran forward eagerly. When they were within fifty

yards of it, she knew that it was the very plane they were seeking..

"It is! Oh, Ralph! Even the license number —so I'm sure! Remember? Look! Do you suppose that man was killed?"

"Would serve him right!" muttered the boy, resentfully. "Stealing a necklace, and crashing a plane that wasn't his! But let's go over and have a peep at him—there's the ambulance."

The crowd, which was still gathering, although the field was in an isolated spot, was being held back by a policeman, for the ambulance was ready to start. Ralph dashed forward, anxious to get a look at the thief before it departed.

"Not that we could claim the necklace now," he explained to Linda, whose arm he was holding, "for we haven't any proofs of our ownership. But at least we could warn the cop to look out for it."

"Back! Back!" shouted the officer, for the driver was tooting his horn.

"Oh, please wait a minute!" begged Linda. "Please let me see the man who is inside!"

The policeman regarded the girl doubtfully, but she was so eager in her pleading that he thought perhaps she had a good reason. Perhaps the man inside the ambulance meant

something to her; he decided to grant her request.

"Take a look, miss," he agreed. "But be quick about it."

Stepping ahead of Ralph, Linda climbed upon the back step of the car, and peered anxiously into it, past the white-clad interne, to the unconscious figure on the stretcher. Suddenly she started violently, and clung to the door of the ambulance for support. It was incredible, impossible! Her knees shook, her hands fell to her side, and she swayed backward in a faint. In an instant Ralph's arms were around her; he carried her out of the crowd.

The unconscious man in the ambulance was none other than Ted Mackay!

Chapter IX

Suspicions

Someone from the crowd handed Ralph a cup filled with water, and before they had gone half a dozen steps, Linda had recovered consciousness. She dropped down to the ground and stared questioningly about her.

"What was it, my dear?" asked Ralph gently, as he held the water to her lips. "Was the man hurt so horribly?"

"No—it wasn't that," replied Linda slowly, remembering all that had happened. "It was just—oh, Ralph! I hate to tell you!"

"Please tell me, Linda," he begged.

She looked about her for a moment. The ambulance had gone, and the crowd, seeing that the girl was all right, began to withdraw, some to examine the shattered plane, others to go back to their cars parked along the roadside. There was nobody listening now, so she decided to answer Ralph's question.

"It wasn't our thief at all," she said. "It was—Ted Mackay."

"Ted Mackay?" he repeated, as if he could not believe his ears.

"Yes."

"Then how do you explain it? That couldn't have been Mackay we met on that field—Mackay disguised, or anything?"

"No. He wasn't tall enough. And he had black hair. Oh, Ralph, I'm sure of that!"

"Then how do you explain it?"

"I don't explain it," she said weakly.

He said nothing more, but he knew that she was not only terribly disappointed in not being able to trace the necklace, but that she was entertaining grave doubts about Mackay's part in the whole miserable affair. Were he and this thief in partnership, playing a wicked game, and had Ted hired the man because he would not let them know his part in the robbery?

But there was no use talking about that now, for Ralph realized that Linda was almost ready to collapse. Drawing her arm through his, he led her silently back to the Pursuit, and put her into the cockpit, indicating that he would pilot them back to Green Falls. Not a word did she utter during the entire flight homeward; she drooped listlessly back in her seat, with an expression of disappointment and despair on

her face. How she wished that she had not come!

No one was waiting for them at the airport, so they took a taxi to Miss Carlton's bungalow. They found the latter on the porch, with only Kitty and Maurice beside her.

"Any news?" demanded the girl, jumping out of the hammock, and rushing down the steps before the taxi had been stopped.

"Some news, yes," replied Linda, while Ralph paid the driver. "But I'm afraid it doesn't mean much. Ralph will tell you all about it."

But the young man was not willing to tell his story until he had asked Miss Carlton to take care of Linda.

"She fainted at the field," he explained. "The hot sun and the crowd, I expect." He did not want to speak of Ted Mackay before her, while she felt so ill. "So if you'll take Linda up to her room, Miss Carlton, I'll tell Kitty what I know—and tell you later."

The words aroused Linda's aunt immediately, and she lost interest in the necklace temporarily. What were a few pearls, anyway, in comparison to her precious girl? She hurried her off to bed, and Ralph turned to Kitty and Maurice.

"You see it was this way," he began, and Kitty stamped her foot in exasperation.

"Don't be so slow, Ralph!" she commanded.

"Why, here comes Linda's father!" interrupted Maurice, as another taxi stopped at the bungalow. "What do you think of that?"

Kitty looked vexed. Another interruption! But Ralph was already on his feet, greeting him, and explaining the absence of Linda and her aunt.

"And I was just going to tell Kitty about our pursuit of the thief," he added, "so if you care to hear the story, Mr. Carlton, perhaps you will sit here with us?"

The older man was glad to comply with the request. Naturally, anything that was connected with Linda's first flights was of paramount interest to him.

So, in spite of Kitty's impatience, her brother began the story with the day that he and Linda received their licenses, and ended it with the latter's identification of Ted Mackay, unconscious on the stretcher in the ambulance.

"Mackay!" repeated Mr. Carlton, shaking his head knowingly. "So he was the brains of the crime!"

"I'm afraid so, sir. And I'm afraid that's what made Linda faint."

"Of course it is! She believed in that fellow. But I warned her not to trust him. You see his father worked for me out in Texas and he's an unprincipled fellow. Stole from everybody —not only myself, but even the rest of the help. And got into a mix-up with some Mexicans, and turned them against me. . . . Yes, it must run in the family. The father may even be in on this necklace robbery. I don't know where he is now."

"That explains a good deal," mused Ralph, who had been listening thoughtfully. "I never did like Ted Mackay." He would not admit even to himself that jealousy was the main reason for this dislike. "Besides, Linda probably told him about the Midsummer Ball, and our carrying Kit's necklace to Green Falls. I thought it was funny if that other chap caught on so quickly."

"Did Linda see much of Mackay while she was at the school?" her father asked, sharply.

"I can't say that, although I wasn't always with her. Towards the end of our time we did so much solo flying, that when I was up in the air I didn't know where she was, although she was usually up too—in another plane. But one time I did find her in a pretty intimate conver-

sation—and that was right before we left. She probably told him then."

"Too bad! Too bad!" muttered Mr. Carlton, regretfully. He was wishing now that he had sent Linda to some other flying school.

At this moment, Miss Carlton, having left Linda asleep in her room, came out on the porch to see her young guests. She showed no surprise at finding her brother; for fifteen years she had been accustomed to having him drop in when least expected, without a moment's notice.

"Well, Tom," was all that she said, as she presented her cheek for his brotherly kiss. "I suppose these children have told you the news."

"Yes, and if you don't mind, Emily, I think I'll drive over with them to see Mr. Clavering," he added, for the young people had all risen, and were showing signs of departure. "I'd like to have a talk with him—at least if you'll excuse me."

"Certainly," replied his sister. "And will you be back in time for dinner?"

"I'll come home in half an hour," stated her brother, laughing, for he always teased her about her insistence upon his promptness.

It was natural that he should want to meet

Kitty's parents, that he might at least offer to do his part in trying to recover or make good the girl's loss.

But Mr. Clavering seemed to take the matter almost lightly.

"Of course it's too bad," he said, "but as long as it is only a theft, and not an injury to one of the children, I think it's foolish to worry. And, after all, we may get insurance."

"*May* get insurance?" repeated Mr. Carlton, frowning. "Why shouldn't you get it? I thought that was what insurance was for!"

"I'm afraid ordinary insurance will not cover travel by air," explained the other man.

At these words his daughter burst into tears. Her last hope was gone!

"I never thought of that," said Mr. Carlton, gravely. "That makes a difference. . . . Well, Mr. Clavering, in that case, I guess we had better divide the obligation. I'll raise my twenty-five thousand—the necklace was worth fifty, I understand—as soon as I can."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" protested the other, firmly. "Your daughter was not the least bit at fault. It was natural for her to try her stunts—she wouldn't be human if she didn't! I put the whole blame upon Ralph."

"No! No——"

"Yes, yes! I won't hear anything else. But we'll wait and give the detectives time. If we have caught the leader, as you and Ralph think, it ought to be an easy matter to locate the accomplice. At least, provided Mackay doesn't die."

"That's true!" exclaimed Ralph. "I never thought of that. We better get over to the hospital to see him as soon as possible."

"How about tomorrow morning?" suggested Mr. Carlton. "I'd like to go with you, my boy —I've had some experience in dealing with criminals, ever since the episode with Mackay's father."

"I'll be delighted to have you," replied Ralph. "And in the meantime, I'll call my detective and put him on the other man's trail."

So while Linda slept peacefully at home, her father and her best boy friend made plans to verify their suspicions against Ted Mackay, lying helpless in the hospital, twenty-five miles from Green Falls.

Chapter X

In the Hospital

When Ted Mackay opened his eyes at the hospital the following morning, he did not know where he was. Although he had regained consciousness when the orderlies brought him in from the ambulance the day before, it had not lasted long. An anesthetic was immediately administered, for it was necessary to cut into his arm, and later a drug was given to make him sleep. So, for the moment, he could not understand why he was here—in a ward, undoubtedly, judging from the long row of cots against the wall.

A dull aching pain in his arm and shoulder made him glance suspiciously at his left side. They were bandaged, of course. And then suddenly he remembered.

He had been sent out with a new plane, from his company in Kansas City, to make delivery to a purchaser in Buffalo. Just before he left, a radio message had been received from the

Spring City Flying School, asking all pilots and mechanics to look out for a stolen Waco. Naturally, Ted remembered the plane.

He had been flying quite low, to make certain tests with the plane he was delivering, over the fields beyond Green Falls, when he suddenly noticed a wreck. Complying with the regulations of the Department of Commerce, he descended in order to report the casualty and to render assistance, if possible. Smashed as it was, he recognized it immediately as the old Waco, which he had so often piloted at Spring City. He looked about for the pilot, dreading to find his shattered body in the cockpit.

He had been leaning over, peering into the bushes, when a gun went off at his back, hitting him on the left arm, near the shoulder. Reeling about sharply, he just had time to see a shabbily dressed man run for the new plane. And then everything went black; he couldn't recall what happened, or how he got to the hospital.

"The company's new plane!" he suddenly exclaimed aloud, attempting to sit up in his cot. "It's gone!"

He looked about helplessly for the nurse, for anybody, to verify his fears. But nobody came, although down the hall he could hear

footsteps of people busy on their early morning duties.

Warned by the pain in his shoulder, he sank back on his pillow to wait, and as he lay there quietly, he went back over the events of the past week that had been so eventful for him. He thought of Linda Carlton, of the pride and joy in her beautiful eyes when she had won her license. And of her farewell! A farewell that might easily be forever! Yet through no fault of his own, merely because his father had disgraced himself.

It had always been like that with Ted; it seemed as if his father had tried to spoil his whole life. Just when the boy was ready to enter High School, Mr. Mackay had been dismissed from his job for stealing from the cash-drawer of the store where he was employed. The judge had let him off, for he knew what a splendid woman Mrs. Mackay was, and Ted and his older sister had gone to work to pay the debt. It was hard sledding after that; Mr. Mackay wandered off, working now in one place and now in another, and Ted put off his hopes of study for a while. Then, just as the family were getting ahead, and Ted had started in at an aviation school, the man came back for more money. The last they heard of him was

a year ago, when he had written that he had a real job on a ranch in Texas. But evidently he had done something wrong there, or Mr. Carlton would not be so bitter against his son.

Ted's shoulder was hurting him badly, and his thoughts were not pleasant, so he uttered a weary sigh.

"Well! Well!" exclaimed a cheery voice at the door. "Is the world as sad as all that?"

Ted's mouth relaxed into a smile, the smile that had won him so many friends at the Spring City Flying School. He had not heard the nurse, a pretty probationer, who just entered the ward.

"How's the shoulder this morning?" she asked him brightly. "You're looking better, Mr. Mackay."

"I'm all right," replied Ted, wondering how she knew his name. "But can you give me any news of my plane?"

"Your plane was wrecked, wasn't it?" she inquired.

"No—I hope not! That was the other fellow's plane. The fellow that shot me."

"Oh, I see. Then there were two planes?"

"Certainly. Didn't you know? . . . You seem to know my name——"

"There were some letters in your pocket—

don't you remember? And the address of a company in Kansas City. . . . But I don't think anybody realizes that there were *two* planes—that you didn't wreck yours."

"Oh, but I wouldn't wreck a plane in that way!" he protested. "I think too much of them!" His face lighted up with the enthusiasm he always showed when he talked about flying. "But I've got to get to a telephone!" he added. "I must notify my company immediately of the loss."

"Probably your company knows all about it," she replied. "Anyway, you can't do anything now—except lie still while I take your temperature. And then eat your breakfast. After your wound is dressed—if the doctor agrees——"

"But I've got to get dressed right away! I want to notify them so that they can catch that bandit!"

"Yes, yes. In due time. You must be patient."

"You say they didn't know about that other fellow!" he cried, excitedly. "I tell you——"

He stopped suddenly, for he saw that his nurse had gone off to another cot. There was no use trying to argue with nurses, he learned, for they had to follow the rules laid down by the doctors and the hospital authorities.

So, for the next two hours he did exactly as he was told, not even making an attempt to dress. For his nurse had informed him that he must stay there at least another day.

He was dozing when a representative from his company called to see him. But the man urged the nurse not to disturb him, saying that he would come again the following morning. She told him what she knew of Ted's story, and of his anxiety over the stolen plane, and he promised to send out scouts in its pursuit.

Ted's next two visitors were not so thoughtful of his welfare. Mr. Carlton and Ralph Clavering, who made the trip unknown to Linda, arrived about eleven o'clock, and asked that the young man be awakened at once.

"I think you had better come back tomorrow, if you want to talk to Mr. Mackay," said the nurse, noticing that the two men were not any too friendly towards her patient, for they had not even inquired how he was. "He mustn't be disturbed."

"Then we'll wait until he wakes up," replied Mr. Carlton, firmly. "It's very important that we speak with him as soon as possible."

"You're from his company?" she asked.

"No, we're not."

"Just friends?"

"No."

"Then may I ask what reason you have for wishing to see Mr. Mackay at this particular time?"

"Business. Very important business. We think he is involved in the theft of a very expensive necklace."

"No!" cried the nurse, aghast. It couldn't be true! Why, she had never seen anybody with franker eyes or a more truthful, honest face than this young man with the wounded arm! There must be some mistake.

"Did he act as if he wanted to get out of the hospital as quickly as possible?" asked Ralph, shrewdly.

"Why, yes—but that was only natural. All men, especially young men, are impatient about staying here. Only last week, the day after a man was operated on for appendicitis, he said he had to get back to his office—he just had to! You should have heard him rave. We laughed at him."

"Well, we'll sit down here in the reception room and read the magazines," announced Mr. Carlton. "And you send us word when he wakes up."

There was nothing further she could do, but somehow she was against them. Already she

was on Ted's side. She didn't believe he was one of those wicked gangsters you read about in the papers. Why, he was only a boy! A boy tremendously interested in aviation. She could see his eyes shine when he talked about flying, and the absolute tragedy he believed it to be because a fine plane had been wrecked. It seemed worse to him than being shot. Poor fellow! He would get well, of course, but was this going to cripple him so he wouldn't be able to fly?

About twelve o'clock, when it was time for the lunch trays to be brought in, he awakened. But the nurse had no intention of informing those two men in the waiting-room.

However, they did not wait to be informed. Perhaps Mr. Carlton suspected that the nurse was against him, or perhaps it was merely that he knew that he hadn't much longer to stay—it was imperative that he return to his ranch that night. Anyway, he and Ralph strolled down the hall and found Ted eating his lunch. They walked right into the ward without asking the nurse's permission.

"How d'do, Mackay," said Mr. Carlton, briefly. "How's your wound?"

"Better, thank you, sir," replied Ted, smiling. He had recognized Linda's father instantly,

and a feeling of joy surged through him. What a decent thing for the man to do! Probably Linda had heard of his accident, and asked him to come to inquire for him. Of course he was totally unaware of the loss of the pearls; he had no idea that the thief who had taken the two planes had done so for the sole purpose of stealing a necklace.

Remembering Ralph, too, he managed to smile at him also.

"You certainly managed to wreck your plane," remarked Mr. Carlton, not knowing exactly how to begin. "You're in luck that you weren't killed!"

"I didn't wreck *my* plane, sir," corrected Ted, quietly. "It was the fellow who shot me that wrecked his—or rather the school's, for he had stolen it from the Spring City Flying School, you know. Then he shot at me, and flew off in my plane."

"Oh, is that so?" Mr. Carlton raised his brows, and his eyes narrowed. He didn't believe a word of it.

"And—er—how did you and this thief happen to be together?" he inquired.

"I was taking a new plane to Buffalo, and flying low, making some tests, when I spotted the wreck. So I brought mine down."

"You knew, then, that he had stolen Miss Clavering's pearls?"

"What?" cried Ted, starting upright in bed, and then, shocked by the pain from his sudden movement, dropping back to his pillow.

"You never heard of a valuable pearl necklace that this young man was carrying from Spring City to his sister, by my daughter's plane?" persisted Mr. Carlton. His tone was mocking, insulting.

"On my honor, Mr. Carlton——"

"Come now, Mackay," interrupted Ralph. "Why not make a clean breast of it? We know you—or this other fellow—heard Linda and me discussing it at the field, and we know you used him as an accomplice. We saw him hanging around outside——"

"You are making a big mistake, Mackay," put in Mr. Carlton, "if you don't confess everything now. I'd be willing to give you another chance—if you tell us how you can get a hold of that fellow, and get the necklace back. I know you weren't brought up right—it's not exactly your fault if you don't know right from wrong——"

But this was too much for Ted to bear. The man was insulting his mother! If he hadn't been Linda's father, Ted would have struck

him, crippled though he was. Instead, overpowered by nervous exhaustion, he let out a terrific scream that at least stopped the abuse.

"I do know right from wrong!" he cried. "My mother is the finest woman that ever lived, and she knew what to teach her children! What you say is a lie!"

By this time everybody in the ward was looking and listening in breathless interest, and the head nurse, attracted by the noise, stopped in the corridor.

"You men will leave at once," she commanded, from the doorway, and Mr. Carlton, who was so used to giving orders to others, found that for once he had to obey. He and Ralph picked up their hats and were gone without another word.

After that, Ted was quite ill. His temperature went up, and he became delirious. The little nurse was both angry and remorseful. It was her fault, she thought, for not keeping those dreadful men out. Accusing an innocent boy like her patient!

The visitors, however, went away dismayed. They hadn't proved a thing.

"Unfortunately I have to leave tonight right after dinner," said Mr. Carlton, as Ralph drove him back to his sister's. "I guess we'll have to

turn the whole thing over to the detectives."

"Well, we'll see what Greer and his men can do," replied the other. "One good thing, Mackay can't get away from us, crippled as he is. And the other fellow is such a poor pilot that he'll crash sooner or later."

"If he doesn't get out of the country first," muttered Mr. Carlton, dolefully.

"What does Linda think about the affair?" inquired Ralph, for he had not seen the girl since her aunt helped her to go to bed the preceding afternoon.

"I don't know. I haven't seen her. She was still asleep when I left this morning."

"I imagine she believes Mackay guilty. That's what knocked her over so yesterday."

"Well, she'll get over that," returned her father, briefly. And he invited Ralph to come into the house for luncheon.

The young man, however, had the good taste to decline. It would be a ticklish situation at best—and besides, Linda ought to have some time to be alone with her father, if he were leaving so soon.

"But tell Linda I'll be over after dinner," he added. "The bunch is planning a canoe party."

Chapter XI

An Anxious Day for Linda

Never in her life did Linda remember being so exhausted as she had been on the evening of her flight to Green Falls. With her Aunt Emily's help she had somehow gotten into bed, and eaten the supper of milk-toast which the maid had brought to her.

Inside of an hour she was fast asleep, not to awaken until eleven o'clock the following morning, although her aunt, still a little worried about her fainting, was in and out of her room three times. It was upon the last occasion that she finally opened her eyes.

"Oh, such a good sleep, Aunt Emily!" she murmured, contentedly.

"Do you feel better, dear?" inquired the other.

"Just fine, thanks. And hungry."

"I'll have Anna bring you up some fruit, and then you can have lunch with us. Or would you rather have a regular breakfast in bed?"

"Just the fruit, please, Aunt Emily," re-

plied Linda. How kind, how thoughtful, her aunt always was! No real mother could ever be more so. "You are so good to me, Auntie!" she cried, impulsively catching the older woman's hand.

"And you're always so appreciative, dear," responded her aunt, affectionately. "I don't think most young girls are like you. They just expect their parents to do everything. Older people like thanks."

"I guess everybody likes to be thanked, when they deserve it. . . ." She jumped out of bed, and slipped into a chiffon negligee that hung over the chair. "And now I'll hurry with my bath!"

"Yes, dear—because your father arrived yesterday, after you had gone to bed. He'll be here for lunch, but he has to leave right after supper."

"Is he downstairs now?" asked Linda, excitedly.

"I don't know whether he has come in or not. He went somewhere with Ralph this morning."

"With Ralph?"

"Yes. Something about the theft, I believe. . . . Well, dear, I'll send up some raspberries —or would you rather have cantaloupe?"

"Cantaloupe, I think, Aunt Emily," replied Linda, as Miss Carlton left the room.

Some of the happiness with which Linda awoke seemed to vanish at her aunt's statement about her father and Ralph. She had forgotten for the moment about the necklace—that airplane accident, and the shock of finding Ted Mackay. What could it all mean? Was Ted really involved in the affair?

By this time her father must know about him, since her Aunt Emily said he was with Ralph. What were they up to now? If Ted really were in league with the thief, would they put him in prison too? She hated the thought of such a thing—it did not seem possible. Surely, there must be some explanation. All of a sudden she longed fiercely to see the boy, to hear the story from his own lips. But he was in a hospital, unconscious—perhaps dying!

Anna came in with the cantaloupe as Linda finished her bath, and she sat on the edge of the bed to eat it. She made a pretty picture, her soft curly hair damp from the water, her cheeks pink with color after the cold shower, her charming blue negligee wrapped about her slender figure. She looked like a lady of leisure enjoying her late breakfast as if it were a regu-

lar thing; not an aviation student who arose every morning at seven o'clock and put in a hard day's work at school.

When she entered the living-room, she found her father there waiting for her. She was all in white now, white linen sports suit, and white shoes. He held out his arms invitingly, and she leaped gracefully into his lap.

"Daddy dear!"

"Linda!"

"You didn't mind my not waking up for supper last night, did you?" she asked, after she had kissed him. "I would have been too tired to talk."

"Of course not! It was the wisest thing to do. Sometimes when you force yourself to keep awake after a strain like that, you find you cannot go to sleep again. But you're rested now?"

"Fresh as a freshman," she replied, laughing.

"And I'm mighty proud of my little girl," he added, affectionately, "for passing your examination and flying all the way up here without any mishaps."

Linda's face grew sober, and her eyelids fluttered.

"But—I didn't, Daddy. You—you heard about the necklace?"

"Yes. That was too bad, but I can't see that it was in any way your fault. You'd be a queer flyer if you didn't want to test your knowledge."

"Then you don't really blame me?" she asked eagerly. Her father's approval had always meant so much to her.

"Of course not. It was the boy's carelessness. He agrees with me, and so do his father and mother. I went over to see them last night."

"Ralph hasn't heard anything more, has he?" she asked anxiously. How she longed for news of Ted! But she was afraid to mention his name to her father.

Mr. Carlton, however, answered her unspoken wish.

"No," he said. "We drove over to see Mackay at the hospital this morning, and tried to talk to him. But he wouldn't admit a thing. He became hysterical when we accused him, and the nurse had to ask us to go away. We're as much in the dark as ever."

Linda got up quietly and went over to a chair. Somehow she wouldn't sit on her father's lap when he held such widely different opinions from her own. But Mr. Carlton did not seem to notice that she had gone. He sat perfectly still, thinking.

"You really believe Ted—Mr. Mackay—had a part in the horrible thing?" she asked, dismally.

"I don't think there is a doubt of it."

"But how do you explain the fact that he was shot? Surely, if he and this thief were working together, one wouldn't shoot the other!"

Her father shook his head, and smiled indulgently. What a child she was! What did she know about the wickedness of criminals?

"I'm sorry to tell you, dear, that in spite of that old proverb about there being honor among thieves, there isn't much. They are so utterly selfish and unprincipled that if one finds that his pal is getting the better of him, he doesn't hesitate to wound—and oftentimes kill—the other. If Mackay was making off with the necklace, and this other fellow saw that all his work had been for nothing, one could hardly blame him for shooting. . . . No, I'm afraid that doesn't prove a thing."

Linda sighed; everything seemed hopelessly black for Ted.

"Will they put him in jail?" she asked.

"Whom?"

"Mr. Mackay."

"Of course, when he is well enough. Our de-

tectives will see to that. We can't actually convict him till we have more evidence. But we can force him to tell what he knows about this other thief."

A lump came into Linda's throat, and she felt as if she couldn't talk any more. For the time being, even her interest in her plane was gone. It had brought so much unhappiness—first to Kitty, and now to Ted Mackay.

She was thankful when her aunt came into the room, to take her mind from her morbid thoughts. At the same time, Anna announced luncheon.

"What are you planning to do this afternoon, dear?" inquired her Aunt Emily, as she ate her iced fruit-cup. "Because I want part of your time."

"Certainly, Aunt Emily. But tell me, have you decided you would like to go up in the Pursuit?"

"No, no—nothing like that. I want to live a little while longer, dear—Green Falls is so pleasant! But, seriously," she added, "I do want you to do something for me. I want you to try on your costume for the Midsummer Ball. I had to order it without asking you, dear, for of course you were too busy learning to fly, and it hadn't come when we left Spring

City. But I think it is very charming—and I hope you will like it."

"I'm sure I shall. But, Aunt Emily, I could have worn my flyer's suit, and saved you all that trouble."

"You're going to get tired enough of that suit, attractive though it is. Besides, everybody would know you. And I like you to look especially pretty—in fluffy, feminine things. I have chosen the costume of Queen Mab for you."

"Oh, that will be adorable!" cried Linda, her eyes sparkling with pleasure, for she too loved dainty things.

"And may I see you when you are trying it on?" put in Mr. Carlton "Your mother once wore something like that in a fairy play—and she was very beautiful. I'd like to see whether you remind me of her."

"Certainly, Daddy. I'll put it on right after lunch. And then I'll do whatever you want. Take you up for a ride, if you would like it."

"I think you're too tired for that," he replied. "No—I'll wait till the next time I come. Besides, the mechanics ought to have a chance to go over your motor before you fly it again. Don't forget the promises you made to me."

"I won't forget, Daddy. I'll telephone over to the airport this afternoon."

"By the way, daughter, have you ever tried jumping with a parachute? Did they make you do that at school?"

At his question, Miss Carlton suddenly stopped eating and gazed at the girl in terror. Surely Linda would not do such a hazardous thing as that!

"Yes, Daddy," replied Linda, blushing, for she did not want to say anything about her jump with Ted Mackay. "Lieutenant Kingsberry himself was with me. Mr. Taylor didn't want to let me try it—I don't think he has much use for girls who want to fly—so I went straight to the Lieutenant. He went up with me himself."

"Wasn't it a dreadful experience?" asked her aunt, with a shudder.

"No—not terrible at all. I felt a little queer before the parachute opened, but after that it was delightful. Just softly floating down from the skies. I loved it."

"Well, I'm glad you did it," remarked her father. "Because now you won't be afraid if you ever have to."

"I am hoping I won't have to—with my Pursuit. Not that I'd be afraid, but because it would be the end of my plane. Think of just leaving it alone, to crash!"

"It would be too bad, of course—but I could buy you another plane. We couldn't buy another daughter, could we, Emily?" he asked his sister.

"Don't talk about it!" begged Miss Carlton, miserably.

"All right," agreed Linda. "Suppose Daddy tells me what he would like to do this afternoon —after I try on the costume."

"Sure you don't want to be with your young friends?" he inquired.

"I'll have all the rest of the summer for them."

"Then let's go for a little drive in your roadster. Out to some pretty road. And come back in time to go swimming with your crowd."

"I'd love that, Daddy!" she exclaimed. Then, turning to her aunt, "But is my car here, Aunt Emily? Did Thomas bring it up all right?"

It was strange indeed, that she had forgotten to ask about it. Always before she had driven it herself, while Thomas, the chauffeur took charge of her aunt's limousine. This time he had hired a friend to drive the other, and brought hers himself.

"Yes, he drove it up yesterday," replied her aunt.

The hours that followed would have been very pleasant for Linda, had she not felt underneath her cheeriness, a growing anxiety about Ted Mackay. After their little outing, she and her father put on their bathing-suits and joined the group at the lake. In the diving, the racing, the polo game, Mr. Carlton proved a match for the young people; indeed he was the ringleader in suggesting tricks to the more daring members of the crowd. Even Louise, who had always stood somewhat in awe of him because he was sterner than her own parents, had to admit that he was a good sport.

Ralph, who had not counted upon seeing Linda until evening, was delighted to find her at the lake, and tried immediately to date her as his partner for the canoe trip of the evening. But Linda shyly refused, telling him that her aunt was one of the chaperons, and the only partner she was willing to have. She shrank from the thought of talking to Ralph about Ted, or the robbery; she decided not to see him alone.

Early after supper Mr. Carlton departed in a taxi, and Linda and her aunt drove over to Louise's bungalow to join the group for the canoe trip. There were a dozen young people

besides themselves, and Mr. and Mrs. Haydock, too. Six canoes had been chartered.

"Canoeing will seem kind of tame after flying, I guess," remarked Dot Crowley, as the young people walked over to the lake. "By the way, how soon will you take me for a fly?"

"Anybody might take you for a fly," remarked Maurice Stetson. "You buzz around so!"

Linda smiled, but she answered Dot's question immediately. Maybe the latter was as keen about airplanes as she was herself! You never could tell.

"In a few days," she said. "For the time being I want to hold myself and my plane in readiness to chase that thief—if we ever get the chance!"

"You still worrying about those pearls?" inquired Maurice, lightly.

"Naturally," answered Linda.

"Well, I command you to forget it. Kitty'll soon get over it. Anybody as beautiful as Kit is, doesn't need pearls. Besides, when she marries me, I'll buy her a bigger string!"

"You mean *if*, not *when*, don't you?" countered Kitty. But she was evidently in high spirits again, thanks perhaps to the young man who made no secret of this adoration.

There wasn't much opportunity for conversation, however. Jim Valier had brought his mandolin, and from the moment when the canoes pushed off until they were tied at the opposite side of the lake, where the young people made a fire and toasted marshmallows, everybody sang. Linda naturally joined in with the music, but only with her lips. Her heart was still heavy with the misfortune the preceding day had brought.

On the way home she made up her mind to telephone the hospital the following morning. At least she could inquire about Ted—and maybe—oh, how she hoped it would be possible—she could speak with him, and hear from his own lips the explanation of his connection with the unfortunate robbery.

Chapter XII

The Search for the Thief

For the first time in her life, Linda Carlton was thankful that her father was not at home. He would object to her calling Ted at the hospital, but now it was impossible to ask his permission. Nevertheless, she was trembling when she took off the receiver and gave the hospital's number.

"Mr. Mackay left last night," the attendant told her, "to go to his home. He was very much better."

"Oh!" exclaimed Linda, hopefully. That was good news indeed. But she wanted to learn more.

"Would it be possible for me to talk to his nurse?" she inquired. "I really have something important to ask."

The attendant hesitated; it was not their custom to call nurses from their duties to answer inquiries about their patients. But Linda's voice was so eager that the man decided for once to waive the rule.

"If you will hold the line a minute," he

said, "I will see whether she is busy. You don't know which nurse it was?"

"No. Probably one of the ward nurses."

Linda was forced to wait several minutes, but in the end she was rewarded. A cheerful girl's voice informed her that its owner had taken charge of Ted Mackay while he was at the hospital.

"But are you a friend or an enemy of Mr. Mackay, Miss——?" she inquired, cautiously. "Carlton is my name," answered Linda. "And I am a friend."

"I'm glad to hear that. Mr. Mackay is such a nice boy that it is a shame he has to have enemies. . . . Now, what can I do for you?"

"Tell me what you know of his story," replied Linda. "You see I only know that he was shot and that his enemies are trying to connect him with a thief who stole a valuable necklace. I know it can't be true. It just can't!" She was talking rapidly, excitedly. "I knew if I could see him he could explain everything. But he's gone!"

"Yes, he went home last night. To his mother's. But I can tell you the facts, for he told me the whole story. He was piloting another plane—for his company—and spotted a wreck. It proved to be this thief, who evidently wasn't

hurt by the crash, and so shot Mr. Mackay and made off in his new plane. It seems perfectly simple to me. I don't see how anybody could possibly accuse Mr. Mackay, when he was actually wounded himself."

"How does his company feel about it?" asked Linda.

"Same as we do. He is to go back to his job in a day or two, as soon as he feels rested."

"Thank goodness!" cried Linda. "Then everything is O. K. Oh, you can't know how thankful I am! And so grateful to you!"

"You're entirely welcome," concluded the young nurse, pleased to have been of some help.

Linda began to sing as she replaced the receiver, and she went out on the porch in search of her aunt. She just had to tell somebody about Ted's innocence, and the weight which had been taken from her heart at the nurse's reassuring words. Miss Carlton had not heard any particulars about the story; indeed she scarcely knew who Ted Mackay was. So, omitting the parachute jump, Linda began at the beginning and related everything she knew about him, since that day last April when she had met him at the Red Cross Fair, and he had promised to take her up in an airplane.

"And you don't think he's wicked, just because his father is, do you, Aunt Emily?" she asked, anxiously.

"No, of course not, dear. It wouldn't be fair to jump to any such conclusion as that. Every human being has a right to be judged on his own merits—not his parents'."

"That's what I think," agreed Linda. "But Daddy says——"

"Hello, everybody!" interrupted a gay young voice from the hedge in front of the bungalow, and, turning about, Linda saw Ralph Clavering striding up the path.

"Hello!" she answered, trying to make her voice cordial. Such a handsome boy, so charming—why did he have to be so unfair to Ted? Poor Ted, who had never had one-tenth of Ralph's advantages!

"I've got news!" he cried, as he took the steps two at a time, and swung into a chair.

"About the necklace?" demanded Miss Carlton, immediately.

"Yes. From our detectives. They have spotted a gas-station that sold a can of gasoline to a red-headed fellow who said he wanted it for an airplane."

"Really, Ralph!" exclaimed Linda, scornfully. "You don't call that news, do you? There

must be plenty of red-haired pilots in our part of the country."

"I know. But that isn't all. This agent carried the gas over in his car to a field where the plane was waiting, and he says there was another chap in it who answered the description of our thief."

"Was the plane a Waco?" questioned Linda, keenly.

"The fellow wasn't sure, but when Greer described it, he thought it was."

"And is that all?" Miss Carlton's tone showed disappointment.

"'Is that all?'" repeated Ralph, in amazement. "Why, that's plenty!"

"I don't see how that will help you to catch your thief," remarked the woman.

"But it will! Greer has telephoned the hospital, and located Mackay today. If he really has gone home, as he said, and hasn't run away, he'll be put through a third degree that'll make him tell where the thief is hiding. Because he must be hiding. He couldn't go very far on the gas in that plane, and all the airports and gasoline stations have been warned to watch out for him."

Linda's eyes were blazing with anger. How could Ralph be so prejudiced, so cruel?

"But Ted doesn't know any more about that thief than we do!" she protested, vehemently. "I talked with his nurse this morning—and she knew all about it. Ted met that thief by accident!"

"By accident is right," remarked Ralph, with a scornful smile. "But never mind, Linda—don't you worry about it any more. Let's talk about the masque ball tonight. You're going with me, aren't you?"

"I certainly am not!" announced the girl, haughtily. "I wouldn't go with anybody who could be so unfair——"

"Children!" interrupted Miss Carlton, distressed at their inclination to quarrel. She had been so happy about the friendship between Ralph and Linda—it was eminently right! When her niece did decide to get married—though she hoped such an event was still far off—she couldn't imagine any young man who would suit her so well as Ralph Clavering. Such family! Such social position! And plenty of money! For Miss Carlton was always afraid that sometime her brother might lose his. He was so careless about it, he spent it so recklessly upon both his sister and his daughter. And, though the older woman had enough of her own securely invested in bonds to take care

of her old age, she feared for Linda. Educated as she had been at that expensive private school, she was in no way trained to earn a living. She did not dream that Linda would be only too delighted to go into aviation as if she were a boy on her own responsibility—like Ted Mackay!

"If I admit I'm jealous of Redhead, and say I'm sorry," conceded Ralph, "will you forgive me and go to the dance with me tonight?"

His beautiful dark eyes were pleading, and for a moment Linda almost weakened, thinking of all their experiences together, and especially that moment when they both had thought they were so happy, in regaining the box that supposedly held the necklace. But she remembered Ted, and the cruel gruelling he would be subjected to very soon, because of Ralph's suspicions, and she closed her lips tightly.

"Not unless you promise to call off your detectives from Ted Mackay," she pronounced, firmly.

"But I can't do that—couldn't now, even if I wanted to. It's too late."

"Then I'm not going to the party with you."

"But Linda, dear," put in Miss Carlton, going towards the screen door in her embarrassment at being a witness to the quarrel,

"it's too late to arrange to go with anybody else. All the other girls already have their partners!"

"I'll go with you, Auntie!" replied the girl, complacently. "Lots of girls go with their parents."

"Very well," agreed her aunt, disappearing into the living-room, with the unpleasant thought that it was only the unpopular girls who were forced into such a situation.

As soon as she had gone, Ralph came over to Linda's chair. But he was afraid to touch even her hand—she looked so aloof and determined.

"Linda—after all we've been to each other——" he began.

She stood up, holding her head high.

"I think you'll have to excuse me, Ralph," she said. "I'm very busy."

"All right," he returned, sullenly. "Have it your own way, then! I'll get Louise to go with me."

"Very well. Good-by." Her tone was icy; she did not even offer to shake hands with him.

Ralph turned and hurried down the steps, angry at himself for pleading so hard, angrier at her for being so cold. No girl ever thought

of treating him—Ralph Clavering—like that before! The very idea! Most young ladies would be only too delighted at his invitation! And all for the sake of a penniless, dishonest, red-headed pilot! For Ralph had not yet learned that there were some things which he could not buy with his father's millions.

So he strode to the nearest telephone booth, and called Louise Haydock who, although she was flattered by the invitation, did not immediately accept. She had already promised Harriman Smith, and she so informed Ralph.

"Well, there isn't any law that says a girl can't go with two men, is there?" he demanded. "If she happens to be popular enough! Can't we all three go together?"

"Why aren't you going with Linda?" inquired Louise, shrewdly.

"We've quarreled," he admitted.

"Then make it up!" she advised. "Pull yourself together, Ralph—and apologize."

"I tried to, but it was no good. No, we're off!"

"Then Linda hasn't any partner?"

"She says she's going with her aunt," muttered Ralph.

"Oh, that won't do!" exclaimed Louise.

"Wait, Ralph, I'll fix exerything. I'll get Harry to take Linda—he's crazy about her anyhow—and then I'll go with you."

"O. K., Lou. You're the little sport!"

"And fixer," added the girl, to herself, as she bade Ralph good-by, and called first Harry and then Miss Carlton.

Louise's suggestion seemed like an act of Providence to the older woman; it would have been mortifying indeed to her to have Linda appear at the ball without a masculine escort, as if the girl were a mere wallflower. Harriman Smith had been most agreeable about the whole arrangement; anything Louise decided suited him, he told her. And Linda, too, was delighted with the news.

She came out of her bedroom while her aunt was talking on the telephone, dressed in her flyer's suit.

"Where are you going dear?" inquired Miss Carlton, in anxious surprise.

"I'm going scouting," explained Linda. "I think I'll fly around—pretty low—and look for wrecks. I have a hunch that that thief has smashed his plane by now. He was such a poor pilot, you know I told you."

"Well, be careful," cautioned her aunt. "But so long as you fly low, I won't worry."

Linda smiled to herself. If Aunt Emily only realized how infinitely more dangerous it was to fly low than high!

She found her Pursuit in perfect condition, and had it taken to the runway, where she taxied off without the least difficulty. She climbed to about fifteen hundred feet, and flew over past the hospital and the field where the Waco had been smashed. Then she carefully came lower, using her glasses to watch the ground as she flew.

The country was open—there were no buildings and few trees, so she felt safe in keeping within sight of the ground. She was flying along confidently, when suddenly a long pole seemed almost on top of her. Swerving sharply upward, she just avoided striking some wires that the pole was supporting.

"Oh!" she gasped. "What a lucky break! Suppose I hadn't had a foolproof plane!" For she knew that her Arrow had been designed especially for amateurs like herself.

"Crazy of me to fly so near to the ground!" she exclaimed, in self-contempt. "After all the warnings I've had! I deserve a crash!" And she continued to climb upward to safety.

As she flew onward, steadying her thoughts, she decided that it was senseless to try to

hunt the thief with a plane. If she wanted to look for him it would be much more reasonable to use her car—or to hike. So she abandoned that project entirely.

But as she continued her flight towards Green Falls, it suddenly occurred to her that she might help Ted in another way. She could establish his alibi for him—by means of his company! That red-haired man that the agent claimed he saw with the thief couldn't have been Ted, and she would take means of proving it. Then, if Ralph's detectives insisted upon throwing him into prison, there would be a way to have him released.

So she flew back to the airport, confident that her morning had not been entirely wasted, and, to her aunt's relief, she arrived home in time for lunch.

Chapter XIII

The Masque Ball

The gay young set at Green Falls to which Linda belonged had planned nothing for that afternoon except the regular swim, for the ball would be late, and the donning of their costumes would take a good deal of time. Linda, however, even passed up the swim in favor of a nap, for she was very tired. Besides, she had no desire to meet Ralph at the lake or anywhere else.

Like all the social affairs at this charming resort, the masque ball—the greatest event of the season, with the possible exception of the field day at the close—began early. Dinner at the Carltons was over by half-past seven, and, after assuring herself that Linda's costume was to her satisfaction, Miss Carlton left the bungalow. She was a patroness, of course, and she wanted to get to the Casino early, to pass final judgment upon the decorations and the music.

Harriman Smith arrived at half-past eight,

in a taxi, for as one of the poorer members of the crowd, he did not possess a car of his own. Linda, in the filmy dress of the fairy queen, with a crown of golden stars about her hair, welcomed him into the bungalow.

"Linda!" exclaimed the young man, in positive awe. "I never saw anyone so beautiful in my whole life!"

She smiled shyly, pleased at the compliment. But of course as yet he had not seen the other girls in their costumes!

"It's the dress," she explained modestly. "If there's any credit, it should go to Aunt Emily. She selected it. . . . I like your costume, too, Harry. You're Robin Hood, aren't you?"

"Yes—I'm glad you can recognize me, anyway. . . . But Linda, seriously, I just know you'll take the prize for the most beautiful woman!"

"I didn't know there was a prize."

"Of course there is. And for the most handsome man. And the best dancers—and the funniest. . . . Probably some more I don't remember. . . . But I guess you never think much about prizes."

"I do about some prizes," she admitted. "Cups for endurance flights, and high altitudes—and things like that!"

"Naturally—trust you to be up on anything connected with airplanes. I suppose you'll be winning some of them yourself sometime. But when it comes to social events——"

"Well, you're often the same way, Harry," she teased. "Look at the parties you passed up last winter, just because of your engineering course!"

The boy smiled, not at all displeased by the observation, for he was a youth who took his studies seriously. Unlike Maurice Stetson and Ralph Clavering, who seemed interested only in the fraternities and the sports at college, he went there with the idea of working. And he liked Linda all the better for recognizing his ambition and understanding it.

"But we oughtn't to stand here talking, forgetting all about your taxi," Linda reminded her companion. "Why don't you dismiss it, and take my car?"

"A queen mustn't drive!" he protested. "And you wouldn't like me to run your car——"

"I don't mind you, Harry. You're never careless. It's people like Maurice that I can't bear to see handle it."

"I don't blame you one bit," he said, and realizing that she would really prefer to go

in her own roadster, he did as she suggested.

All the way to the Casino they both carefully avoided any mention of Kitty Clavering's loss, or, in fact, of anything distasteful—even the quarrel with Ralph and the change of plans which had thrown them together as partners. Linda asked him how the different members of the crowd had paired off, and Harry told her as much as he had happened to learn at the lake that afternoon. Kit and Maurice were of course going together, and Dot Crowley and Jim Valier—the smallest and the tallest members of their set. Sara Wheeler had promised Jackson Stiles, and Harry seemed to recall that Sue Emery was accompanying Joe Sinclair. He did not mention Louise and Ralph.

It was just a little before nine when they reached the Casino, gayly lighted with Japanese lanterns, and decorated with flowers and streamers. The wide French windows of the dance hall were all thrown open, and the huge verandas were as beautifully lighted as the inside of the Casino. Strains of music floated out from the orchestra, which was already in place. Upstairs there would be bridge tables for the older members of the party and the supper would be served on the roof-garden.

As the couple entered the wide doors of the

Casino, a surging of pride swept through the young man because of the girl at his side. In spite of her mask, people must recognize Linda Carlton, so stately, so lovely, so charming! With what wisdom her aunt had chosen that costume! The girl was every inch a queen.

In the dressing-room there was naturally a great deal of excitement, for the girls were all trying to identify each other. Linda spotted Louise immediately—dressed as an Egyptian Princess. Her costume was unusual, daring; she stood out among all the others as a sunflower might among a bunch of spring blossoms. And of course she wore huge, odd, earrings.

"Linda, you're sweet!" she cried, starting forward to kiss her chum, and stopping just in time as she remembered the make-up on her lips, and the amount of time she had consumed putting it there.

"Sh!" warned Linda. "Don't give me away!"

"I won't, darling. But everybody will know you anyhow. Come on—you couldn't possibly improve yourself! And we must hurry. I hear them lining up now for the grand march."

A laughing, happy group, the girls made their way back to the ballroom where their part-

ners claimed them. It amused Linda—and yet it hurt her a little, too—to see Ralph Clavering lead Louise away without even seeming to notice her. But Harry Smith was right there too, as if to protect his partner from any unpleasantness.

The music of the grand march rolled out triumphantly, and the couples fell into step, circling the big room, and walking past the committee on the raised platform, whose members were to pass judgment on the costumes for the awarding of the prizes. As Linda walked demurely at Harry's side, past this intent, solemn body of men and women, she never lifted her eyes. She was all the more amazed when, a couple of minutes later, she heard a childish voice cry out above the music.

"Does 'ou fink me cute?" and, turning about, Linda recognized Dot Crowley, dressed as a little school-girl, and actually calling attention to herself. Of course everybody laughed; you just had to smile at Dot. And her long-legged partner, Jim Valier, dressed appropriately as Uncle Sam, looked so out-of-place at her side.

The costumes were really marvelous; if Linda had not come for any other reason than to see them, it would have been worth while. There were several hundred people at the ball,

the proceeds of which were given entirely to charity, and though there were naturally many repetitions—numerous George and Martha Washingtons, Pierrots and Pierrettes, clowns and gypsies, there were also many unusual ones. But although she did not realize it, there was no one in that whole assembly so charmingly beautiful as Linda Carlton.

The grand march consumed almost an hour, after which the judges withdrew to make their decisions, and then the dancing began.

The floor was perfect and the music excellent; Linda fell into step with her partner and gave herself up to the enjoyment the pastime always afforded her. Whenever she had a good partner like Harry—or Ralph—she always experienced a marvelous sensation of floating along to the strains of the music, a sensation that somehow reminded her of flying. And then they passed Ralph and Louise, and Linda wondered whether the former would ask her to dance.

After that she danced with all the boys she knew, in turn—all except Ralph. Even when Harry managed a dance with Louise, while Linda was dancing with a stag, Ralph did not cut in. But this did not spoil her good time, for she felt that she had been in the right,

championing Ted, even though her father was on the other side.

Ralph's avoidance of her niece had not escaped Miss Carlton's eyes, and she sighed. Why was there always some drawback to rich people, she wondered? But perhaps Ralph would get over his childishness when he grew older. And in the meantime Linda did not lack for attention.

Just before the party went up to the roof for supper, the prizes were awarded. Linda Carlton won first prize for the women—and, ludicrous as it was, Ralph Clavering, as King Arthur, was selected first among the men. They walked across the floor together, Linda giving him a shy smile. To Louise and Harry, and Miss Carlton, who knew about the tiff, the coincidence was very amusing.

Two other guests whom Linda did not know were awarded the prizes for the funniest costumes, and, to their own amazement, Louise and Ralph were called out as the couple who had given the best exhibition of dancing. There was no shyness as these two stepped forward. Ralph, looking roguish, held out his arms and whistled a tune, and as Louise slipped into them, they waltzed across the floor.

The supper was gorgeous in every detail;

the food was excellent, the service perfect. Linda felt that she had never been to quite so magnificent a party before.

"You do like all this, don't you, Linda?" asked her partner, as they finished their ice-cream, molded in fancy forms, like small dolls or figurines, in pastel colors. "You really like parties? Because I sometimes wonder——"

"I love them," replied the girl, her eyes shining. "That is, when they come once or twice a summer, like this. But I would get awfully tired of them if I had nothing else."

"But next winter," he reminded her, "when you are a débutante——"

"I'm going to try not to be," she interrupted. "If I can slide out of it, without hurting Aunt Emily's feelings. I want to go to a ground school, and study aviation seriously."

"You mean make it your life work?" he asked, respectfully.

"Yes—seriously."

But it was no time to talk; the music had started again, and everybody wanted to make good use of the last, best hour of the party.

And so for all that evening, Linda Carlton was the care-free, popular girl that her Aunt Emily loved her to be.

Chapter XIV

The Flying Trip

About eight o'clock the following morning while her friends were still sleeping, Linda Carlton, clad in a bathing-suit and a beach robe, dashed down to the lake. She thought an early morning swim before anyone was up would clear her brain and give her a chance to think over her plans and come to a decision. If possible, she meant to get in touch with Ted's company before the detectives arrived at his home to arrest him.

She had thought, naturally, that she would find the lake deserted, for everybody ought to be tired out after last night's party. She was therefore amazed and a little annoyed to see some one else already in swimming.

"I'll go in the other direction," she decided, but before she was even in the water she heard a familiar voice calling her.

"Linda!" cried Louise Haydock, waving her arms, and starting to swim rapidly towards her. "Ho—Linda!"

"Lou!"

"Yes—me!" shouted the other girl. "But did you say 'Who' or 'You'?"

"I said 'Lou'!" replied Linda, laughing good-naturedly. It was a relief to find the other bather was her chum.

They were within talking distance now, and Louise hurried to the shore. They sat down together and gossiped about the party, Louise laughing over Ralph's childishness in trying to keep up the quarrel with Linda.

"To tell you the truth, Linda," she added, "I'm bored with him. As a matter of fact, I'm fed up with most of the boys. Harry's all right, but he has so little time. All the others are so pleased with themselves. They think we can't get along without them!"

"Well, can we?" teased Linda.

"Why not? Except for dances——"

Linda dug her toes into the sand and smiled.

"That's the trouble with us. There's always some 'except.' We ought to make up our minds to stay away from dancing, if we really want them to get over their superiority complex."

"It would be pretty dull in the evenings—we'd have to find something else to take its place. . . ." Louise paused to watch an airplane that was flying overhead. "Linda!" she

cried, abruptly, "I have it! Let's go off on a trip—just the two of us—in your plane! Be gone a week or two!"

Linda grabbed her chum's hands in delight. What a marvelous idea! The freedom! The adventure of it! And she could link it up with her own errand to Kansas City.

"Oh, I'd adore that, Lou!" she exclaimed. "Would you really trust yourself to me? Honestly? You wouldn't be afraid?"

Louise put her arm about the other girl and hugged her tightly.

"Of course I would! I have an awful lot of confidence in you. And I'd love it!"

Linda's brow darkened suddenly. For as always, she had to think of others besides herself.

"What's the matter?" demanded Louise, watching her companion's face.

"I am thinking of Aunt Emily—and your mother," answered Linda. "Wondering whether they'd give their consent—and if they did, would they worry themselves to death?"

"Mother would be all right—I can manage her, and Dad too," said Louise confidently. "And, after all, think of the flying that girls do now-a-days. A little picnic like this is tame, compared to flying from England to Australia."

"Yes, I know—but Aunt Emily's so scary about planes."

"Well, I tell you what we could do—we could map out our whole trip beforehand, and decide where we would land each night. We could probably get the names of the hotels where we would stay. And each evening after supper, we could telephone the people at home."

"That's an idea!" agreed Linda, enthusiastically.

"You wouldn't want to camp out, anyway, would you? They would be sure to object to that—just two girls alone."

"No; we'd have to buy a lot of equipment, and I'd hate to load down the plane. But I'm afraid Aunt Emily would even object to our staying alone at hotels. You know how particular she is."

Louise was silent a moment, thinking it was too pleasant an idea to give up at once. She'd have to devise a way out of their difficulty.

"I'll tell you," she announced, finally. "We can plan to stop with people we know each night—or at a hotel where some friend is staying. We surely can round up some relatives and friends!"

"That's it!" cried Linda, joyfully. "That ought to be easy! And we can send telegrams

ahead. But the places will have to have some sort of airports."

"Oh, most every town has some kind of landing place," said Louise. "I don't think that need worry us."

"There's another thing," added Linda, slowly. "I'd want to start today. Because I must go to Kansas City as fast as I can." And she explained to Louise her plan about establishing Ted's alibi.

Louise leaped into the air in her excitement and approval.

"That's great! You know me, Linda—I always hate to wait about anything. We can pack our suit-cases and send our wires in an hour if we hustle. Hurry up! Hop in for a dip, and come right back!"

Ten minutes later they dashed breathless and wet into the dining-room of the Carlton bungalow, where Miss Carlton was eating a leisurely breakfast. In their excitement over their idea they could scarcely explain it. But at last the older woman understood; she heard them out, and gave her rather reluctant consent.

"If you don't make the trip too long," she added.

"A week?"

"Isn't four days enough? Then we would have to arrange only two stopping places—the same one coming back. And I am sure I could do that very easily."

The girls agreed, delighted even with a compromise. Nothing they had ever done promised to be half so thrilling.

They would fly southwest, making their first stop Kansas City, where Ted's firm was located. Searching through her address-book, Miss Carlton remembered that she had a cousin living in a hotel in that city and she wired her immediately to reserve a room for the girls for that night, and to chaperon their visit.

"And then we'll fly to Sunny Hills—as our destination!" cried Louise, with happy inspiration "It's in Colorado—where my Aunt Margaret and Uncle John live! Oh, we'll have no end of fun there!"

"You're sure they won't mind?" asked Linda.

"They'll be tickled to death. They have a huge place—sort of a farm—and six children. Of course they're not children now—several of them are married—but they always keep open house. We used to go there a lot when I was a kid."

"All right—you send that wire," agreed

Linda, as she hastily swallowed some food, "and I'll get ready and go down to my plane, and see that it's O.K."

"How about some lunch?" suggested her Aunt Emily.

"Oh, yes, please—if you don't mind!"

In an incredibly short time the girls were dressed, their suit-cases packed, the wires sent, and the lunch in readiness. About half-past ten, without saying a word of good-by to anyone except Miss Carlton and Louise's parents, they took off.

The sky was clear and blue, without even a cloud to threaten them with fog or storm. It was Louise's first ride in a plane, yet she was not a bit afraid. She said she had never been so thrilled before.

"I'm getting the craze, Linda!" she shouted, above the noise of the motor. "If I only had a suit like yours!"

She was wearing her riding-breeches and a tan sweater-blouse, with a close-fitting hat of the same color—a costume, which though neat and appropriate, had none of the style and charm of her companion's.

"But you can't wear earrings!" teased Linda, pulling at Louise's ears to make sure

that the other girl heard and understood what she was saying.

"In the suit-case!" returned Louise, laughing and pointing towards the article she named.

But neither of the girls wanted to try to talk. They were content to rise higher and higher into the air, to feel the glorious sensation of smooth flying, knowing that everything was just right. Both of them began to sing.

On, on they went, over fields and towns, watching their map and their instruments, dipping now and then to catch a glimpse of the landscape below, climbing back to the heights for safety. As the clock on their plane neared twelve, they realized they were hungry, because breakfast had been such a sketchy affair for them both. Louise untied the box, and they ate joyously. Their first meal in the air!

It was still early when they arrived at Kansas City, and Linda flew a straight, swift course to the large grounds that were occupied by the company for which Ted Mackay worked. Without the slightest mishap or difficulty Linda brought her plane to a perfect landing in the large area set aside for that purpose.

A nice-looking young man in a flyer's uniform came to them in welcome. His face showed

no surprise; it was evidently an every-day occurrence to meet feminine pilots.

"I would like to speak to the sales-manager," said Linda, after she had answered his greeting, and made sure that this was the right place. "I want to make some inquiries about Ted Mackay."

"All right," agreed the young man. "I'll take you to Mr. Jordan immediately."

But when they were introduced, Linda felt suddenly shy. What right had she, she asked herself, to pry into Ted's affairs? She wasn't a relative—or even a friend, if she adhered to her father's command. So it was Louise who came to the rescue, as she always did in emergencies, and proceeded to take charge of the interview.

"You see," she explained, "the people who had that valuable necklace stolen are pretty much perturbed over the whole affair—and naturally they hired detectives. Well, Mr. Jordan—you know what detectives are! They bungle everything."

"Yes?" remarked the man, looking smilingly from one girl to the other, thinking that they, too, were rather excited.

"And just because they found Mr. Mackay by the stolen plane, and because they located a

gasoline agent who swears that he sold gas to a red-haired man for that same plane earlier in the day, they're sure Mr. Mackay is a thief."

"And they're going to his home—to arrest him!" put in Linda, now more at ease.

"But they can't prove anything," Mr. Jordan assured them, calmly.

"Oh, but they say they'll put third degree on him, or whatever it is, and force him to a confession. And—and—think of his poor mother!"

"But what do you girls want me to do?" he asked. "I don't see how I can stop them!"

"We just want you to establish his alibi," explained Louise. "Write down everything Mr. Mackay did from early morning till the time he started off in that new plane."

"O.K.!" exclaimed Mr. Jordan, a light breaking over his face. "That's easy! We had a salesmen's meeting at the Winton Hotel, and lunched together. I can swear Mackay was there—and so can half a dozen others. We came back here about three o'clock, and Mackay was looking over the plane and studying his maps for about half an hour. Then he took off—for Buffalo."

"That's just what we want!" cried Linda, and Louise added, "wonderful!" and squeezed

the elderly man's hand. He smiled at her as if she were his daughter.

"And will you dictate that to a stenographer, and send a copy to Ted by air-mail?" urged Linda.

"Certainly," he agreed.

"And now," added Linda, "will one of your mechanics look over my plane and put it away till tomorrow? We want to get our suit-cases, and taxi to my cousin's hotel."

So, half an hour later, when the girls were making themselves known to the elderly couple who were expecting them, they spoke joyously of the perfect success of their first day's adventure, but they did not mention their mission on Ted Mackay's behalf.

Chapter XV

Sunny Hills

The girls' visit with the elderly couple at the hotel at Kansas City was restful, but uneventful. As soon as they arrived, Linda telephoned to her aunt over long distance, and made a satisfactory report. Dinner and the movies occupied their evening.

Early the next morning they bade their host and hostess a temporary farewell—for they were scheduled to return in a couple of days—and took a taxi to the airplane company where their Arrow was being kept.

"It's a little cloudy, girls," observed Mr. Jordan as he came over to meet them. "But I don't think it will actually storm before night. Are you going far?"

"To a place called 'Sunny Hills'," replied Louise, producing her map. "In Colorado."

The man studied it for a few minutes, and then pointed out their best course.

"And your plane's O.K.," he added. "She certainly is a neat little boat."

"I'm fond of her myself!" replied Linda,

her eyes shining as they always did when she spoke of her most precious possession.

"And have you had any word from Mr. Mackay?" asked Louise.

"Yes. He's coming back today," answered Mr. Jordan. "I sent a plane for him, with the letter you suggested. The pilot wired last night that he arrived safely, and both men would be back on the job tomorrow."

"He didn't say anything about the detectives?"

"Not a word."

"Then everything must be all right!" breathed Linda, with a sigh of relief.

"Well, good-by," concluded Mr. Jordan, as the girls stepped into their plane. "And fly carefully. That's rather lonely country you're passing over."

"But the skies are safe!" returned Linda, as she started her motor.

It was indeed a more desolate stretch of land than any they had flown over before. The girls noticed this as they sped on, the miles piling up in rapid succession.

This time they carried no lunch, for they had hesitated to ask at the hotel, and as the hours passed, they grew very hungry. Moreover, the sky was so cloudy that the sun was totally ob-

scured, and they had to be guided entirely by instruments. Two or three times they seemed to get off their course, and it was almost five o'clock when they finally landed at an airport and inquired their way to Sunny Hills.

"It's about five miles north," they were told. "But wouldn't you rather leave your plane and taxi over?" their informer suggested.

"No, thanks," replied Linda. "Because we want to have our plane there, to use it if we need it, and to show to our friends. But we would love to have something to eat, if you can tell us where there is a stand for refreshments."

While the man was leading them to a sandwich booth, a mechanic came up and filled the plane with gas, and at Linda's request, looked it over hastily. Fifteen minutes later the girls took off again, having been assured that there was a field for landing at Sunny Hills, because, it seemed, the owner—or possibly the owner's son—had a plane.

As they descended over the field in back of the huge country house that was the home of the Stillmans the girls observed numerous people running out of the doors and from the porches to be on hand to welcome them. By the time they had landed, Louise counted seventeen.

"Hello, everybody!" she shouted, as the noise of the motor died. "Get our wire?"

"Surest thing!" answered a man of about thirty, tall and heavily-built, and smiling.

An elderly woman was pressing through the throng, holding out her arms to Louise.

"Aunt Margaret!" cried the girl, rapturously. "I'm so glad to see you! And I want to introduce my chum—Linda Carlton."

"I am more than delighted to meet you, my dear," said Mrs. Stillman, pressing Linda's hand—"I am *proud* to meet you!"

"Thank you," murmured the girl, her eyelids fluttering in embarrassment, for she felt that as yet she had done nothing to merit praise.

"And now I'll tell you everybody's name," continued the older woman. "Though I know you can't possibly remember them."

She proceeded to introduce her friends and her children—the latter all younger than Roger, the man who had first spoken to them, and evidently her oldest son. There were four small children among the group, two of them grandchildren of Mrs. Stillman.

"I want you girls to use my hangar," offered Roger, immediately. "My plane's away getting repaired. So shall I put yours away for you?"

"Oh, thanks!" replied Linda, gratefully.

"It's so nice to find another pilot—to do the honors, and the work!"

As the happy, noisy group walked with the two girls back to the house, they asked all sorts of questions at once, about the trip, the plane, the relatives back home. Louise and Linda answered as fast as they could, but finally gave up, laughing in their confusion.

"Now everybody stop talking!" commanded Mrs. Stillman, and though her tone was jovial, Linda could see at once that she meant what she said, and that she was used to being obeyed.

"Our brave flyers must be awfully tired, and this is no way to treat them, before they have even had a drink of water. Elsie," she nodded to a girl about Linda's age, "I want you to take the girls to their room, and I'll send up their suit-cases and some iced tea. And then they are going to have peace until dinner-time!"

"Oh, Aunt Margaret, we're not so tired," protested Louise. Still, the thought of a cool shower, iced tea, and a few minutes for a nap was very pleasant.

Elsie and Louise, who had been great friends when they were younger, spending several long, happy summers together, were both delighted at the chance of renewing their friendship. Linda, too, found Elsie charming, and the three

girls were soon chatting merrily over their iced tea.

"I want you to tell me the news of your family first," said Louise. "And begin in order, so Linda can get them straightened out. I mean —which ones are married, and which have children, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes, do," urged Linda. "I only know Roger —because he is a pilot—and you, by name."

A knock at the door interrupted them, and when Elsie answered it, two young men brought in the girls' suit-cases.

"The twins," explained their sister. "Dan and David. It really isn't hard to tell them apart, if you look closely."

"I remember!" cried Louise. "Your hair is curlier, isn't it, Dan? And David has a broken finger."

"Righto," agreed the latter, holding up his finger for inspection, and keeping his eyes on Linda. He had fallen for her charms already.

"You're excused," said Elsie, tersely.

"With many thanks," added Linda, graciously.

"Now begin over again," urged Louise, when the boys had gone. She began to open the suit-cases and to pull out the negligees, so that they could be perfectly comfortable.

"Well," continued Elsie, settling back in the pretty cretonne-covered chair that matched all the furnishings of the lovely, yet simple bedroom, "you know Aunt Margaret, of course. Those other two elderly women are friends—no need for you to learn their names.

"Of us, Roger is the oldest—he's thirty-one—and he isn't married. He's had dozens of girls, but I think he loves being a bachelor. He goes in for all kinds of racing—motorboat, automobile, and now airplane. And he adores young girls. You want to watch your step, Linda, for we're always expecting him to marry all of a sudden sometime. To somebody a whole lot younger!"

Linda smiled, and Louise shook her head knowingly.

"Linda's wise," she remarked.

"And Anita's the next oldest," went on Elsie. "I guess you didn't recognize her, did you, Louise? The stout woman, with those two children clinging to her."

"No, I didn't!" exclaimed her cousin. "But remember, it's been ten years since our family were here. I do recall her now—she was a High School graduate that summer. And so thin!"

"Well, she's fat now, and so is her husband. You'll see him tonight—they're spending the

summer here. They have two kids. . . . The twins come next—they're twenty-three, and then my other married sister Jennie. You remember Jen?"

"Naturally!"

"And I'm the baby!" concluded Elsie, cheerfully.

"But does that account for that whole crowd?" asked Linda. "Lou said she counted seventeen."

"Oh, the others were gardeners, and gardeners' children, and servants. There are twelve of us at dinner every night, with father and Anita's husband. And you girls will make fourteen."

"I always thought it would be wonderful to have a big family," sighed Linda. "My aunt and I live all alone, except once in a while when my father comes home."

"All the more reason why you should spend a couple of weeks with us!" urged Elsie, cordially.

"We'd love to, but we can't," answered Louise. "But we'll promise to come oftener, now that Linda has her Arrow."

"And that reminds me," put in Linda, "that we must call our folks."

Elsie handed her a telephone, which was on

a little table beside the bed, and made her excuses and left them alone. It was almost time to dress for dinner.

Before the girls had answered the summons of the gong, the rain, which had been threatening all day long, came in torrents. But it did not dampen the spirits of the happy group that was gathered about the long table.

David Stillman, a starry-eyed young man with a serious expression, had managed to persuade his mother to let him sit next to Linda on her left, while Roger, the eldest, had naturally preëmpted the place on her right. The younger man, it seemed, believed her to be the ideal girl he had always dreamed of. He tried almost immediately to make her promise to play tennis with him, to go canoeing and swimming. Roger, on the other hand, saw two days' fun ahead of him, playing with the girls and the plane, and he made up his mind not to give his younger brother a chance.

Sizing up Linda immediately as a girl seriously interested in aviation, he began to talk on that subject, shutting out poor David completely. He told her about his plane, and the trips he had made, and the races he had won.

"But you are a new pilot, aren't you?" he asked her.

"Yes, why?" she asked. "Did I do anything wrong?"

"No, indeed! You fly like an old-timer. But what I mean is, you haven't gone in for any competitions yet, have you? Air-derbys, endurance flights—height records?"

"No, I haven't had time."

"But you will?"

"I don't know. I want to do something. But just what. . . ."

"You have a wonderful opportunity," continued Roger. "Because you have ambition, and time, and youth—and enough money to back you." He paused to eat a generous slice of roast-beef. Unlike David, who was staring moodily at his plate and playing with his food, Roger ate with enormous appetite. "You see, the trouble with most of us is, that we haven't the time and the money. And the very rich are seldom ambitious."

"I am hoping to do something next year," Linda announced, slowly. "But not until I study some more."

"Wise girl!" was his comment. "I wish my kid brother—Dan—were of the same opinion. I can hardly keep him out of my plane—and he hasn't even a license. He's a perfect pest."

"Won't you please talk to me?" entreated a voice on the other side, and turning her head, Linda realized for the first time how she had been neglecting David.

"I'll give you all the rest of the dinner-time!" she said, laughingly. But the conversation at once became so general that she did not have a chance to keep her promise.

After dinner the rain abated, but nobody went out except Dan, who said he was always looking for adventure. But in such a crowd, they did not miss him; the young people danced and sang and played pool and ping-pong in the game-room.

They were just finishing some lemonade and cake which Mrs. Stillman had brought out for their refreshment, when a telegram arrived for Linda. Her mind flew instantly to Ted Mackay, wondering whether he had been arrested in spite of all her efforts to help him.

But the news proved worse than anything she had expected. It was from her aunt.

"Your father seriously hurt. Fly to ranch at once."

Helplessly, she handed the telegram to Mrs. Stillman, who read it aloud to the others. Heroically, Linda managed to keep from crying.

"Thank Heaven for the Pursuit!" cried Louise, who had her arms about her chum. "We'll get there in no time."

"Let me go with you," suggested Roger.

"No—thank you," stammered Linda, clinging to Louise. "I need Lou—more than anybody."

"Well, then, I'll map out your course for you," offered the young man. "It's strange country to you?"

"Yes. I've never been to this ranch before. Dad had another one that I used to visit, when I was a child." And she gave Roger the exact location.

Ten minutes later, with their arms still entwined, Linda and Louise went up to their room, having exacted a promise from Mrs. Stillman to waken them at five o'clock the following morning.

Chapter XVI

The Accident

At seven o'clock the following morning, after eating the hearty breakfast upon which Mrs. Stillman insisted, the girls entered the Pursuit, and taxied off, waving farewell to Elsie, Roger, and their hostess. Of the large family, only these three—and the cook—had risen in time to say good-by. Even David had overslept; but his eldest brother was on hand to help the girls get their start.

Fortunately, the rain was over, and both Linda and Roger believed that, barring mishaps, the flyers should reach their destination early in the afternoon. With this hope, both girls kept their spirits high; they refused to worry about Linda's father until they saw for themselves. For Miss Carlton was likely to look upon the dark side of things, and it was probable too that the help at the ranch were frightened by the accident to their employer.

Tears of gratitude came to Linda's eyes when she saw the enormous lunch which Mrs.

Stillman had been able to provide at such short notice, and she did not know how to thank the kind woman or her son. So she merely smiled gratefully, and waved good-by.

Louise kept the map of their course in her lap, and for two hours they flew on, making no attempt to talk, but every once in a while pressing each other's hand in sympathy and affection.

As the sun was growing hotter and higher in the sky, Linda was beginning to wonder whether they were not somewhat off their course. She examined the map.

"We ought to be nearing that town!" she shouted, pointing to a spot which Roger indicated by a large dot on the map. "And I don't believe that we are."

"Fly lower!" suggested Louise. "Let's see!"

Cautiously the young pilot descended, but though both girls looked eagerly, there were no roofs or other evidences of a town. An almost continuous expanse of shrubbery seemed to cover the ground, and Linda did not care to land.

So she went higher again, and pointed her plane south, trusting that they were right.

For two hours more they continued to fly without seeing any of the landmarks for which

they were so eagerly watching. Afterwards Linda remarked that she believed they had been going in a circle.

The sun was almost directly overhead now, and both girls were feeling hungry, for their breakfast, though substantial, had been an early one. They were just considering opening their box to eat, when Linda noticed a queer noise in the motor.

"Something's wrong, Lou!" she shouted, trying to smile as if she were not worried. "We'll have to land."

"Here?" gasped Louise, in horror.

"Yes. Watch the ground! We must find a good place."

Louise was gazing about at the sky and the horizon, when, turning around, she happened to glance at her companion's face. A set look had come into Linda's eyes, her lips were rigid. Uneven, yet deafening, was the threatening sound of the motor. Suddenly it let off a terrific explosion.

"Will we be killed?" screamed Louise, hoarsely.

Linda did not try to answer. She needed every ounce of brain power, of energy for the test that was ahead of her. She was working frantically with the joystick. So Louise too, kept

quiet, and looked over the side of the plane—and prayed.

At first it seemed they were dropping terrifically; but gradually, frightened though she was, she could feel that some safety device was taking hold. The speed was lessening. Down, down they went, but more gradually now.

And then they were close enough to the ground to see it. A woods of stumpy trees stretched under them, but over to the right was a field. Would Linda be able to guide the plane there, or must they be dashed against the tree-tops, to meet a sickening death?

How would it feel to be dead, Louise wondered. And oh, her poor mother and father! Even in those few seconds, it seemed as if her whole life flashed before her, and although she was really a very sweet girl, she believed herself a monster of ingratitude. Not a bit like Linda—who was always thinking of her Aunt Emily and her father!

Linda, on the other hand, had no time for any such thoughts. She was working as she had never worked before, guiding her stricken plane. And—miracle of miracles—they were passing the tree-tops! They were over a field of weeds.

"Thank God!" cried Louise, reverently.

"Wait!" whispered Linda, not sure yet that they were safe.

The landing was not easy. The plane came down and hit the ground and bounced up again. Suppose it should pancake? Linda held her breath, suffering greater agony than Louise, who knew less of the dangers. But in a moment the valiant little Arrow came to a stop, in the shrubbery.

In a rapture of relief and thanksgiving, Louise grasped Linda and kissed her, while the tears ran down the young pilot's face. For a moment the girls sat thus in silent embrace, each too filled with emotion to speak.

"Come, let's get out, Lou," said Linda, finally, and shakily they both stepped from the plane.

"I wonder where we are," remarked Louise, trying to make her voice sound natural.

"We'll get out our maps and study the situation. But first let's eat. I'm simply famished. It must be noon at least."

They found upon consulting Louise's wristwatch that it was ten minutes of one.

Resolutely deciding to be cheerful, they opened the hamper which Louise's Aunt Margaret had packed. What a delicious lunch!

There was a whole roast chicken, and tiny

dainty lettuce sandwiches—at least a dozen of them. Pears and cherries, and lemonade in a thermos bottle. And a beautiful little layer cake evidently baked just especially for them, though how the cook had managed it, they had no idea. They spread out the paper cloth and attacked the food ravenously.

"It looks pretty desolate around here," remarked Louise, as she nibbled at a chicken leg. "I don't see a house in sight."

"Or a road either, for that matter," returned Linda. "I wish we could get to a telephone—and send a call for assistance."

They ate silently for a while. How good the food tasted! In spite of their distress and worry, both girls enjoyed that lunch.

"Have you any idea what is wrong with the plane?" asked Louise, as she broke off a piece of chocolate cake. "It was all right yesterday."

"Yes. That mechanic at the airport gave it a hasty examination. Funny he didn't notice anything so serious as this. . . . Louise, do you suppose that Roger could have done anything to it?"

"No," answered Louise, thoughtfully. "No; I think Roger knows what he's about. But I have an idea, Linda."

"What?"

"Do you remember hearing a plane very close to the house when we were playing ping-pong last night?"

"Yes. I thought it was the airmail."

"So did I. But I believe now it was the Pursuit—with Dan piloting!"

"Dan Stillman?"

"Yes. He's a regular daredevil. And you know Roger won't let him fly his plane."

A pained look came into Linda's eyes, as if she herself had been mistreated.

"Oh, Lou, that seems awful," she said. "He wouldn't do a thing like that, would he?"

"He must have. Remember, he went out right after supper. And he's so conceited. He wouldn't think he could hurt it. But I'll tell you how to find out—look at the gas. You remember you had her filled at that airport."

Holding their cake in their hands, both girls dashed excitedly back to the plane and looked at the dial which indicated how much gasoline was left. And, sure enough, the supply was running low! Too low to be accounted for by the flying they had done that morning. In fact, it was almost gone.

"You're right!" cried Linda. "Oh, Lou, now we're in a worse pickle than ever. We'll never get to Daddy!" The tears ran down her cheeks.

"Don't!" urged her chum, putting her arms around the other girl. "Don't give up yet! We'll find somebody—on some road—who will send a mechanic to us. And we'll be at the ranch before night!"

"I hope so!" replied Linda, bravely trying to keep up her courage.

They went back to the spot where their lunch was spread—luckily there was plenty left for supper, in case they needed it—and packed the remainder again. Then, arm in arm, they set out in quest of a road. They walked in an easterly direction; that much they knew from the sun.

What they saw appeared to be a flat country, without even any fences or signs of cultivation. Gazing off in the distance, they could faintly distinguish the outline of a house—but it might be five miles away, or it might be fifteen. Or it might not be a house at all; perhaps just some abandoned building or mill.

For half an hour they walked aimlessly onward, till they finally reached a dirt road.

"This is encouraging," said Louise, hopefully. "Let's drop down and wait here till something passes. We don't want to get too far from the plane—if we get out of sight, we might not be able to find our way back."

They sat down on some moss by a small tree and consulted the time. It was half-past two.

Everything was extremely still. No noise of motor or traffic anywhere. No voices. So strange after the places they were used to, for even Green Falls was noisy. And the birds were quiet, too—or perhaps there weren't many, for there were no big trees.

Linda yawned. "I'm so sleepy."

"Take a nap," suggested Louise. "You deserve one!"

"Hardly fair," returned the other. "Aren't you sleepy too?"

"Not so sleepy as you are. Go ahead! I'll wake you if anything comes along."

"And suppose nothing does?"

"Then I'll wake you anyway at three o'clock. We'll have to strike out in some other direction."

So Linda curled up and went to sleep, and Louise, yawning, wondered how she could possibly manage to keep awake. The whole atmosphere was so drowsy—and there was nothing to do.

"If only there were a place to swim," she thought, regretfully. "Cold water would make me a different girl!"

But there wasn't any water at all, as far as

she knew; indeed, she and Linda didn't dare wash in the small supply they carried with them. For they might need it for drinking.

She never knew how it happened, but soon she too was peacefully asleep. For two whole hours both girls slept the dreamless sleep of fatigue. Then, at a quarter of five they were suddenly awakened by the rattle of an old, tumble-down cart, pulled by a haggard horse. The girls sat up with a start, and looked at each other and laughed.

Jumping to her feet in an instant, Louise ran hastily towards the driver. He was staring at them with great curiosity.

"We have been in an airplane accident, and we want to get to a telephone—" began Louise.

But the man only shook his head and grinned.

"Nicht versteh'," he replied, helplessly.

"He's a foreigner," said Louise, turning back to where Linda was standing. "A German, who doesn't understand English."

"I can speak German," said Linda. "At least, I had some, Freshman year. Let me try him!"

But already he was driving away.

"Wo ghen Sie?" called Linda. "Warte!"

He stopped driving, evidently amazed at her words, and pointed to the road ahead of him.

Encouraged by this display of intelligence, Louise jumped up on the cart, and waved her arms in the direction of the airplane, in the field half a mile away.

"We want *help!*" she cried. Then, turning to Linda, "What's the German word for help?"

"I don't know," answered the other girl. "But I think he understands. If he does meet anybody, I think he'd send them to us."

So Louise climbed down again, and waved good-by to the man as he continued on with his cart, and, faintly encouraged, the girls went back to the plane to eat their supper.

Chapter XVII

The Lost Necklace

Many thoughts raced through Linda's mind, as she and Louise sat beside the airplane, nibbling at their frugal supper. For this time, they had decided to eat sparingly; nobody knew how long they might have to stay there, without any more food.

But all of Linda's thoughts were regrets. Regret that her father had met with an accident, regret that Dan Stillman had borrowed her Arrow, regret that she was unable to locate the trouble herself and repair it.

Louise, with her usual practical cheerfulness, interrupted these gloomy meditations.

"We have three good hours of daylight left, Linda," she announced, glancing at her watch. "To try another direction. There must be a real road around here somewhere—where automobiles go. Texas isn't the end of the world."

"If we're actually in Texas!" returned Linda. "It may be Oklahoma, for all we know."

"But Oklahoma has roads, too. Come on, finish your cake! We must hurry."

Taking their coats along, for the night gave promise of being cooler, the girls set off in the opposite direction from the one they had taken that afternoon. This time they had to go right through the shrubbery—the dangerous shrubbery which had threatened disaster to their landing.

"This is awful!" exclaimed Louise, pausing to pull a brier from her sweater. "There can't be any road here."

"On the contrary, I think we'll be more likely to find one, once we get through this. The very fact that we can't see beyond is hopeful."

"That's true," admitted Louise, starting on again.

They walked for some time, carefully picking their way through the undergrowth, thankful that they were wearing breeches. At last they came to a more open space, and stopped to look about them.

"No road!" exclaimed Louise, in disappointment.

"But that looks like a stream over there, Lou—between those two banks!" cried Linda.

"Oh, if it only is! Then we could have a swim!"

"If we ought to take the time."

"I think we might as well, Linda, because it's

going to get too dark for us to take a chance getting lost tonight. Let's have our swim and go back to the plane to sleep. Then tomorrow morning we'll start to hike—if we have to go all the way to the ranch on foot!"

"We won't have to do that, because we have plenty of money," Linda reminded her. "Once we get back to civilization, our dollars will be some good. And, even if we have to leave the Pursuit, and never see her again, it would be worth it to get to Daddy!"

Having come to this decision, the girls hurried rapidly towards the stream, and then, taking off their flyers' suits carefully, under cover of their coats, in case there should be some human being around, they both plunged in.

The water felt cold, and oh, so refreshing! They swam happily for some minutes, forgetful of all their worries, in the joy of the invigorating pastime.

When they had gone some distance, Linda suddenly realized how swift the current was, out in the middle of the creek. Already they were several hundred yards downstream.

"Lou!" she called. "We must be careful of this current!"

Her chum did not answer, and Linda suddenly experienced another sickening moment

of dread. Suppose Louise were unconscious! She turned around, but she could not see the other girl.

However, the creek turned sharply at this point, and Linda reassured herself with the hope that Louise was beyond the bend. She swam in to where it was shallow enough for her to stand up, and cupped her hands and called.

"Lou! Oh, Lou!"

"Yes!" came the instant reply. "Around the bend."

Linda hurried around the cliff which separated her chum from sight, and there, to her amazement, she beheld a shattered airplane. The wings and the propeller were gone—had evidently been floated out on the stream and swept away on the current, and the plane itself was smashed to pieces. Louise was standing beside it, holding a man's coat in her hand.

"Ye gods!" cried Linda, shocked by the horror of such a wreck. "How terrible!"

But Louise was searching the pockets of the coat madly, excitedly, as if she had no thought for the man who had been killed.

"Look, Linda!" she cried triumphantly. "I had an inspiration it might be your thief! I've got it!"

"What?" demanded the other.

"The necklace!"

Both girls held their breath while Louise steadied her nervous fingers and opened the box —a cheap pasteboard affair, totally unlike the original one in which Kitty Clavering's pearls had been sold. To Linda's unbelieving eyes, she held up the costly jewels.

Louise dropped down on the ground, absolutely overcome with emotion, and Linda sat beside her, examining the necklace for herself, as if she could not believe her eyes. But there was no doubt about it; it was the real thing this time.

"That man didn't know much about flying," remarked Linda, finally. "I suppose, though, he realized that his only chance of escape lay in getting over the border. . . . But Lou, if his coat is here, why isn't he?"

"He probably took off his coat before anything happened. But his body may be somewhere in the wreckage. I—I'd just as soon not see it, wouldn't you, Linda?"

"Of course not," replied the other, with a shudder of repulsion. "Come on, Lou, let's go. But don't let's try to swim with that necklace. I'd rather walk."

"So would I."

Both girls scrambled to their feet, and started

back towards their coats. Suddenly Linda stopped, horrified by what she saw. Over in a little cove, away from the main stream, were not one, but two bodies, half floating, half caught on the shore by the weeds and underbrush.

"It's the thief, all right," she managed to say. "And I wonder who the other man was."

Louise squinted her eyes; she had no desire to go any closer, and in the fading light it was hard to see clearly.

"He looks—as—if—he had red hair," she announced, slowly. "That would explain about the gasoline agent, who tried to put the blame on Ted Mackay."

"Of course!" cried Linda. "Isn't it all horrible? As if any necklace could be worth this! I wonder when it happened."

"Probably last night, during the storm. That would be too much for an inexperienced flyer."

"Of course."

The girls picked up their clothing and dressed hurriedly, reaching the plane just as it was beginning to get dark.

"Let's make a fire," suggested Linda, "and tell each other stories till we get sleepy. We mustn't try to go to sleep too early on this hard ground, especially after having had naps."

"Are you scared at all, Linda?" asked Louise.

"No. What of? Ghosts—or tramps?"

"Both."

"Well, I'm not afraid of tramps or robbers because I have my pistol—Daddy made me promise to take it with me on all my flights—and I'm just not going to let myself be worried about ghosts. After all, those two dead men deserved their fate, didn't they? And I mean to forget them. Now, tell me a story!"

"What about?"

"Some nice new novel you've read that I haven't."

So Louise began the story of "Father Means Well"—a very amusing book she had just finished, and the girls kept their camp-fire going until eleven o'clock. Then, when both were certain that they were sleepy, they spread out Louise's raincoat on the ground, and, crawling close together, put Linda's on top of them. Almost instantly they were asleep, forgetful of accidents and thieves, not to waken until the sun was brightly shining again.

Chapter XVIII

In Pursuit of the "Pursuit"

From the moment that Ted Mackay had been shot by the thief who stole Kitty Clavering's necklace, everything had gone wrong for him. Not only had he been wounded and forced to lose time from work, but the new plane, which was worth thousands of dollars to his company, had been stolen. And, in view of the fact that the robber was not a licensed pilot, it was very unlikely that the plane would stand the test, even if it were ever recovered.

Then, added to his other troubles, Ted had been accused of being in league with the thief! Ralph Clavering believed he was guilty, and so did Mr. Carlton. But what worried him most was whether Linda thought so too.

The little nurse at the hospital had been a great comfort, believing in Ted as she did, implicitly, from the first. But when he had gone home, he said nothing to his mother of the suspicions aroused against him. The good woman had enough to worry about, with the unhappy

life she led, and the constant menace of his father's returning in trouble or in need of money. But Ted's conscience was clear; all the detectives in the world could not make him a criminal when he knew that he was innocent.

He wasn't surprised, however, when two men arrived at his home the day after he had reached it. Two plainclothes men, with warrants for his arrest.

His first anxiety was of course for his mother. If she should believe that he was following in his father's footsteps! Why, at her age, and after all she had been through, the shock might kill her! Her one comfort in life had always been that her three children were fine, honest citizens, that her teaching and training had been rewarded.

Fortunately when the detectives arrived, she was out in the back yard, working in her little garden. But what could Ted do? To argue with these men would only arouse her attention, bring her hurrying to the front porch to see what was the matter. For she seemed to live in daily fear of trouble between her husband and the law.

"But you have no evidence to arrest me," Ted objected, quietly, in answer to the man's brusque statement.

"You are wrong there! We have evidence. The gasoline agent, who sold you gas for the plane. The description fits you perfectly—a great big fellow, with red hair. Besides, you were caught in the very place where the other thief escaped."

"But I had nothing to do with it! I can prove it!"

"How?"

"By other men in the company——"

"Are they here?" interrupted the detective, with a hard, sneering look.

"No—but——"

"Then you will come with us until such time as you prove your innocence. One of us will go inside with you while you get whatever things you want."

Ted looked about him helplessly. Oh, how could he keep the news from his mother? It would break her heart!

And his career! What would this sort of thing do to that? Did it mean that, just as he was hoping to make his mark in the world, and rendering valuable assistance to his family, all must stop? With a gesture of utter despair he gazed up into the skies, where he heard the noise of an airplane, coming nearer and lower.

For a moment the other men forgot their

duties, and likewise looked up into the air. For the plane was certainly flying very low indeed, actually circling over their heads. And its roar was insistent; it would not be ignored.

At last it became plain to Ted that the pilot wanted to land. So the young man held up his arm and pointed to field on the right of his house.

Wondering what its business could be, and interested in the plane as everybody is, although it is a common sight, the detectives waited to find out what would happen.

What they actually saw was certainly worth looking at. The pilot was an experienced flyer, and his landing, in the small area of this field, was as neat as anything they had ever witnessed. Both men watched with admiration and awe.

When the motor had been turned off, and the pilot stepped from the plane, Ted recognized him instantly. Sam Hunter—the best salesman, the most experienced flyer of their company!

"Sam!" he exclaimed with genuine pleasure, for although Ted had been with his firm only a short time, this man was an old friend.

"Ted! Old boy! How are you?" cried the other, clasping his hand in a hearty handshake. "How's the shoulder?"

"Pretty good," replied Ted. "I'm ready to go back to work, if I take it a little easy. But—" he paused and glanced at the two men beside him— "these fellows don't want to let me."

"Doctors?" inquired Sam, though Ted's manner of referring to them seemed queer—almost rude. He hadn't introduced them—a courtesy due them if they were doctors, or men in any way worthy of respect.

"They're detectives," explained Ted. "Sorry I can't introduce you, Sam, but they did not favor me with their names. They've come here with a warrant for my arrest."

"By heck!" ejaculated Sam. "Then the little lady was right! The pretty aviatrix who was so worried about you! And I'm just in time!"

"I don't know what you mean."

Sam put his hand into his pocket, and produced the paper which Mr. Jordan had dictated and three of the men had signed. He handed it to the detectives, both of whom read it at once.

"All right," said one of them, briefly, as he handed it back to Sam. "Good-by."

Without another word they turned and fled to their automobile and immediately drove away.

Ted stood gazing at Sam in amazement, unable to understand what his friend had done,

how he had been able to accomplish what seemed like a miracle. In a few words the latter told him of Linda's visit, and her insistence upon the written alibi.

He finished his explanation and Ted had just time to warn Sam not to mention the matter to his mother, when the latter appeared, dressed in a clean linen, beaming at both the boys.

"Are you willing to have me take Ted back again?" asked Sam, after he had been introduced. "Because we need him, if he's well enough to go."

"I'll be sorry to lose him, of course," she answered with a motherly smile. "But I always want Ted to do his duty. And I think he'll be all right if he is careful. But first let me give you an early supper, so that you can do most of your flying by daylight."

Sam accepted the invitation with pleasure, and as the boys sat down at five o'clock to that splendid home-cooked meal, it seemed to Ted that he was perfectly happy again. He knew now that his company believed in his innocence; best of all, he had the reassurance that Linda Carlton shared that opinion!

It was good to be in a plane again, he thought, as they took off, half an hour later. Good to be

up in the skies, with Sam—who was a friend indeed!

The whole trip was pleasant, and Mr. Jordan's greeting was just as cordial as Sam's. When the former heard what a life-saver his message had been, he was more impressed than ever with the cleverness of the two girls who had visited him.

"And if you'd like to see them and thank them yourself," he continued, "I'll arrange for you to combine it with a visit to our Denver field. The girls are out there in Colorado, they said—'Sunny Hills', I believe the name of the village is."

"Thank you, sir!" cried Ted, in delight and gratitude. "I don't deserve that—after letting that other plane get away from me!"

"Not your fault a bit!" protested the older man. "We've got insurance. Still—if you could happen to sell one on your trip, it would be a big help to us."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Jordan. Now—when do I start?"

"Tomorrow morning. At dawn, if you like."

So it happened that when Linda and Louise were taking off for their trip to Texas, that was halted so sadly, Ted Mackay, at the very same hour, was flying to Denver.

He reached his destination without mishap, and went back to Sunny Hills that night. He had some difficulty in finding the place, stopping as the girls had, at the airport to inquire, and reaching the Stillman estate about ten o'clock that night.

Thinking naturally that the airplane was Linda's, and that the girls were back again for some reason, Roger and his brothers went out to welcome them.

Ted explained quickly that he was a friend of Miss Carlton—it was the first time he had ever made such a statement, and there was pride in his tone—and that, as he had just been to Denver, he wanted to stop over here and see her for a few minutes.

"Shucks! That's too bad!" exclaimed Roger with regret. "Miss Carlton left this morning for her father's ranch in Texas."

Ted's smile faded; the ranch was the one place where he could not visit Linda.

"But you must come in and make yourself at home. Stay all night—you won't want to fly any more tonight. Why!" he cried, noticing Ted's bandage, "you've been hurt!"

"Last week," replied the other. "It's almost well now. But—really, Mr. Stillman, though I

thank you, I have no right to impose on your hospitality!"

"It's a pleasure, I'm sure. Besides, I want to look at your plane by daylight. I'm in the market for a new airplane. My old one's being repaired now, but it's so hopelessly out of date I thought I'd try to trade it in."

Instantly Ted became the business man, the salesman, and while he accepted Roger's invitation to put his plane into the other's hangar, he told of all its merits.

So interested were they that they talked for an hour before they went into the house. Then Roger was all apologies, for he knew Ted had had no supper.

He hunted his mother, who was sitting disconsolately at the telephone.

"I'm worried about the girls," she told them. "They didn't phone from the ranch, as they promised, and I have just finished calling it, by long distance. They haven't arrived."

"But they had plenty of time!" insisted Roger. "They started at seven o'clock this morning!"

"Something must have happened," said Mrs. Stillman, anxiously. "Airplanes are so dangerous!"

"I think I know why—if anything did happen," explained Roger, slowly. "It isn't airplanes that are so dangerous as inexperienced pilots. I found out that Dan had Linda's plane out last night, alone."

"Dan?" Mrs. Stillman was horrified. "But he never flew alone in his life!"

"No, because I saw to it that he didn't. But he admitted that he borrowed the Arrow last night."

"This is serious," put in Ted. "We ought to do something—right away!"

"What can we do? I made the girls a map, but they may be off their course. I have no plane—and your time's not your own, Mr. Mackay."

"But I'll have to do something!" cried Ted, excitedly. "Even if I lose my job on account of it! It may be a question of life or death!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," decided Roger. "I'll buy that plane of yours. I want it anyhow. And tomorrow morning at dawn we'll go on a search. . . . Now, mother, can you give Mr. Mackay something to eat—and a room?"

Gratefully the young man accepted the hospitable offers of his new friends and, pleased with the sale he had put through, he fell instantly asleep, not to awaken until Roger both

knocked at his door and threw pillows at him the next morning.

He dressed and they left in short order, after a hearty breakfast, however, and armed with a lunch perhaps not so dainty as that provided for the girls, but at least as satisfying. Roger reconstructed the map, like the one he had made for Linda, and they flew straight for the nearest airport.

Unfortunately, however, they got no information there, no news of a wreck, or of two girls flying in a biplane. But their time was not wasted, for they took the opportunity to question one of the flyers who seemed familiar with the territory around him. They asked particularly about the more lonely, desolate parts of the near-by country, where an airplane accident would not quickly be discovered.

"There's a stretch about ten miles south of here," the man informed them, indicating a spot on Roger's rough map. "Not a farm or a village, as far as I know, except one old shack where a German lives. He hid there during the War, because he didn't want to be sent home, and he has continued to live on there ever since. He has a sort of garden, I believe—just enough to keep him alive—with the fish he catches. And a few apple trees. Once in a while he drives in

here with his apples. I could tell you pretty near where he lives, because I was stranded there once myself. You could drop down and ask him if he heard any planes."

Eagerly the two young men marked the spot and set off once more in their plane, flying in the direction indicated. Before nine o'clock they came to the shack, which was the building that Linda and Louise had spied at a distance. They found the man frying fish on a fire in front of his tumble-down house.

Their landing had been of sufficient distance to avoid frightening him, but near enough for him to hear them. They hurried towards him, Roger almost shouting the question about the girls, before he actually reached him.

But, like Linda and Louise, when they tried to talk to this man, Roger received a shrug of his shoulders in reply, and a muttered, "Nicht versteh."

Unlike the girls, however, Roger commanded a good knowledge of German, and he translated the question with ease into the foreign language.

To both flyers' unbounded delight, they were rewarded with the information that they so longed to hear. The girls were safe—and not far away!

Chapter XIX

Rescued

When the girls awakened at practically the same time—for Louise, in stirring, moved against Linda—they were horrified to see that it was half past eight by their wrist watches.

"Two hours wasted!" groaned Louise. "And it's going to be hot today! Oh, Linda, why didn't we wake up at six?"

"Next time I'll bring an alarm clock," laughed her companion. "Come on, let's straighten ourselves up. I—I—believe I'd rather not swim!"

"No, indeed!" agreed Louise, recalling the horror they had witnessed the night before. "We'll use what water we have—we can't carry much on our hike anyway. . . . Now, let's see what we have for breakfast."

"There's some fruit left, and a little bit of chicken. With water to drink we'll have a fine meal."

They sat down beside the plane to eat, and both girls seemed to enjoy their breakfast,

meager as it was. For each had resolutely made up her mind to be cheerful.

"Are the pearls safe?" asked Linda, as she gathered up the chicken bones.

"In my pocket!" replied Louise, taking them out for examination. "How about your pistol?"

"O. K. . . . Lou! Look! A plane!"

Both girls jumped instantly to their feet and waved their arms and their coats in the air as signals of distress. If only the pilot would look down and see them!

He was flying low enough to make this perfectly possible, but a moment later his ascent sent a sickening disappointment into their hearts. He was going away without even seeing them! Useless to yell; no one could possibly hear above the deafening noise. To be so near to a rescue, and then to have it fail them in the end!

It was Linda, with her knowledge of flying, who was the first to realize that the aviator wasn't really going away, that he was only retreating farther into the field to make a safe landing, clear of them and their plane. In her ecstasy she hugged Louise tightly.

"He's coming down, Lou! To rescue us!"

"How do you know?" demanded the other, incredulously. "He seems to be going farther away to me!"

"No, he isn't! It's only to land clear of us. Lou, it must be Roger!"

"Roger? Why? How?"

"Because he would investigate, when we failed to telephone!"

"But suppose it's another bandit—like—you know! Get your revolver!"

"It's right here. But don't worry, Lou. Look! He's on the ground!"

The pilot brought the beautiful new cabin monoplane expertly to a stop and shut off the engine. To the girls' amazement two men, not one, stepped out. Both of them were old friends!

"Roger! Ted!" cried both the girls at once, in their delight in recognizing them. They felt as if they had been rescued from a desert island.

"You're both safe? Unhurt?" cried Roger, excitedly.

"Thank God!" murmured Ted, reverently.

"Yes—safe, but stranded," replied Louise. "We've only seen one person since noon yesterday—and he couldn't speak English!"

"Nevertheless, he's the one you owe the rescue to!" replied Roger.

"You saw him?" demanded Linda, incredulously. "But you must have been out hunting for us, first, Roger. Oh, I think you're just wonderful!"

"No—the credit goes to Mr. Mackay," returned Roger, modestly. "And the German fellow, with his apple-cart." And he proceeded to relate in detail everything that had led to their pursuit and discovery.

"Your shoulder is all right, Ted?" inquired Linda, after she heard that he was back at his job.

"Yes, fine, thank you. And I can never thank you enough for what you did for me, Linda! I'll tell you all about it later."

"Oh, that was nothing!" protested the girl lightly. Then, turning anxiously to Roger, "Have you any news of my father?"

"He is alive, but that is all my mother could learn last night from the housekeeper over the telephone. But don't worry—you'll be there yourself in a few hours!"

"How?" she asked, glancing helplessly at her plane. "There's something wrong with my motor. It may take a long time to fix—and—if I go by train—Daddy might—" she stopped; she just couldn't say "die."

"You're flying in my new plane!" Roger informed her. "Which I have just purchased from Mr. Mackay. We'll leave right away, or as soon as he examines yours, so he can tell me

what to send out to him here. We'll stop somewhere and phone for help."

"Roger, would you really do that?" cried Linda, in relief. "That would be wonderful!"

"A pleasure!" he said. "Now—tell us what happened to you."

"I really don't know, except that the motor acted awfully queer. But I was lucky enough to make a safe landing."

"It was just dreadful," put in Louise. "I was absolutely certain we were going to be killed. Linda was wonderful."

"She's a fine little pilot," said Ted, admiringly. "Shows she can keep her head in an emergency—and that's one of the most important things for an aviator. . . . Now, let's have a look at the plane."

They all went with him while he examined it.

"I'm afraid I can't fix it without some new parts, and some special tools," he said, making notes as he spoke. "But it's nothing that can't be repaired quickly. If you'll telephone our Denver field, Mr. Stillman, and read this note to the mechanic, they'll send a man out. And as soon as it's fixed, I'll pilot it to you at the ranch, Linda. . . . Be sure to give me the di-

rections. . . . Now, have you girls had anything to eat?"

"Oh, yes, we had supper last night," answered Louise, "left over from our picnic lunch, and we even saved some fruit and some chicken for breakfast."

"Then you people might as well start," urged Ted. "No use wasting time."

"One thing more," added Louise, while Linda busied herself writing the directions for Ted, "we almost forgot! We found a wrecked plane last night—two men dead—and recovered the necklace!"

"What?" demanded Ted, in consternation.

Roger, however, did not know what they were talking about, and no one had time to explain.

"The wreck's over by a stream—about half a mile beyond those bushes," Louise informed Ted. "You can explore it while you're waiting."

"And maybe salvage some of it!" added Ted, hopefully.

Five minutes later the other three took off in the new plane, Louise somehow sitting on Linda's lap. It wasn't very comfortable, but it would not be for far. They would descend at the nearest landing place, Roger getting in touch with Denver, while Louise called Miss

Carlton, Mrs. Stillman, and her parents, and then summoned a taxicab, to take her to a railroad station.

The rest of the trip was smooth and uneventful. Once only did they make a stop after Louise left—that time to get some lunch at a hotel in Fort Worth. In another hour they reached the ranch and landed right on Mr. Carlton's field, for Linda knew from former directions just where the best spot would be.

"Come in with me, Roger," she invited, trying to keep her voice steady.

They approached the house, an old-fashioned, rambling affair, and knocked at the screen door. A middle-aged woman, neatly dressed, came through the hall.

"How do you do, Mrs. Cates," said Linda. "I am Mr. Carlton's daughter, and this is Mr. Stillman, who has brought me in his plane."

"Good afternoon," replied the older woman. "Come right in, my dear. I've been expecting you."

Linda had been watching her face, to try to ascertain from her expression whether the news of her father was bad.

"How—how—is Daddy?" she asked, with trembling lips, as she and Roger followed Mrs. Cates into the big room where her father evi-

dently spent most of his indoor hours. A huge fireplace occupied most of one wall, and there were many book-shelves. A table, a few chairs, and an old couch were all the other furnishings, so that the great room looked almost empty and desolate without its master.

"He is still alive—but unconscious," sighed Mrs. Cates, shaking her head mournfully. Her expression was one of resignation; she felt sure that Mr. Carlton could not get better.

"Unconscious!" repeated Linda. "Has he been so, long?"

"Ever since his fall. He was riding a new horse—that he never should have bought—and was thrown down a steep bank. His leg is broken, but worse than that, he suffered severe internal injuries. Dr. Winston is afraid there ain't much hope."

The words were the cruelest Linda had ever heard; she burst out crying, and hid her face on Mrs. Cates' motherly shoulder. Roger Stillman remained standing, embarrassed. He did not know what to do.

He coughed slightly, and Linda looked up, ashamed of herself for breaking down.

"Is there anything at all, Linda, that I can do for you?" he asked. "Or for you, Mrs. Cates?"

"I'm afraid not, thank you, Roger," replied the girl. "But don't you want something to eat before you start back?"

"No, thanks. I ought to be home early this evening, and I'll get supper then. I'm not a bit hungry now." And with a sympathetic handshake, he left her.

"Would you like to go to your room, my dear —or do you want to see your father first?" asked the housekeeper. "I have him here on the ground floor."

"I want to see Daddy!" replied Linda, wiping the tears from her eyes.

The older woman led her across the hall to a room where the door was open, and she caught sight of her father, lying almost lifeless upon the bed. Impulsively Linda rushed in to him. It just didn't seem possible that he wouldn't recognize her, and hold out his arms to receive her!

But he continued to lie death-like upon the bed, his head motionless upon the pillow. His eyes were closed.

"Daddy! Daddy darling!" she cried, in a voice that shook with pain. Dropping to her knees, she knelt beside his bed, and covered his limp hand with kisses.

But there was no response whatever to her greeting!

For some time she stayed there, praying that he would get better. Mrs. Cates had left them alone, but in half an hour she came back.

"Come, my dear, you must get some rest. Take off your clothing, and wash your face and hands and lie down for a while. Then perhaps you will be able to eat some supper."

Obediently Linda did as she was told, for she realized that the housekeeper was only trying to be kind. And, after a short nap, she had to admit that she felt better.

"Any change, Mrs. Cates?" was her first question, when she sat down to supper with the woman and her husband. The rest of the help ate in the kitchen, but Mrs. Cates realized that this was no time for the girl to be alone.

"No. Not a bit."

"Oughtn't there to be a trained nurse?"

"Dr. Winston didn't think so. I'm doing what needs to be done."

"When will the doctor be back?"

"Tonight, after supper."

Somehow Linda felt dissatisfied, as if enough were not being done. Another doctor should have been called in—a surgeon, perhaps. And surely a trained nurse.

She spoke of these things to Dr. Winston when he came over about eight o'clock that evening. But he shook his head.

"I'm afraid nothing can save your father, my child," he said. "There's only one chance in a thousand he might get well, if we operated. And there's only one surgeon in the United States who ever had any success with that sort of operation."

"But if there is *one!*" cried Linda, eagerly jumping to the tiny hope his words suggested. "We must get that surgeon! Who is he? Where is he?" She was talking rapidly, excitedly, almost incoherently.

"He is a Dr. Lineaweaver. A marvelous man. But I happen to know he is away on his vacation now."

"Where does he go?"

"That I don't know."

"But you know where he lives?"

"Yes. St. Louis."

"Then won't you please call his home and find out where he is, and I'll go for him as soon as I get my plane back."

The doctor shook his head sorrowfully.

"I'm afraid it's too late, my child. I—I—doubt if your father will live through the night.

And you couldn't fly at night—even if your plane were here."

"I can—and will! And I think I hear my plane now—yes, I'm sure that's it. Get me the address—quick—and you put in the call while I run out and see my plane! And try to get a trained nurse immediately. I'll be back before dawn—unless the surgeon's in Europe or Canada!"

And, dashing in to give her father one kiss, she hurried out to find faithful Ted Mackay, alighting from her beloved Arrow.

Chapter XX

The Race against Death

"Ted!"

"Linda!"

"You can't know how thankful I am to see you!" cried the girl. "It—it—may mean that I can save my father's life!" And she told him of her plans.

"If I could only go with you!" sighed the young man. "I hate to think of you flying alone at night!"

"But you do believe I'm capable, don't you, Ted?" Linda's eyes searched his for the truth; she was not asking for flattery, she really wanted his opinion.

"Yes indeed I do!" Ted answered, with assurance. "But it's always safer for two pilots to go together. However, the Pursuit is in fine shape now—and filled up with gas. . . . Linda, I have something to tell you."

"Yes?"

"About the wreck—and—those thieves. . . . The other dead man was my father."

"Your father! Ted!" Every bit of color left the girl's face. What a dreadful, ghastly thing to happen to anybody, and especially to a fine boy like Ted! To come upon his father, dead, in that abrupt fashion, and to know, worst of all, that he had died in disgrace!

Finding no words to express her sympathy, she pressed his hand tightly in silence.

"So you see how much I have to do—why I can't go with you," he continued. "I have reported the wreck to my company, and made arrangements about my father's body. But I must go right home to my mother."

"But how do you explain it all, Ted?" Linda asked.

"I think my father was paying one of his regular visits to the Spring City Flying School —he came there once in so often to get money from me—and he was disappointed to find I had gone. Whether he knew that other man before, I don't know, but it would seem probable that he did. Together they must have cooked up the scheme to follow your plane and get the necklace. . . . That is why it is really fortunate the man got the necklace by a ruse. You see he was armed with a gun—as I later found out, and if he had had to fight for the jewels, I'm sure he wouldn't have hesitated to fire on you!"

"And I suppose your father's being involved would explain why you were suspected," added Linda. "You look like him, I believe."

"Yes. To my regret."

"But perhaps it's better as it is," concluded Linda. "Don't you feel so, Ted?"

"Yes, I do. It—will be so much easier for my mother. . . . But Linda, we mustn't stand here talking. Every minute is precious to you."

"No. I can't go till Dr. Winston comes out with the surgeon's address. He's putting in a long distance call. However, I will go in and change into my flyer's suit, if you don't mind," she added.

Five minutes later she reappeared with the information that Dr. Lineaweaver was in Louisiana—at a small seaport town which Ted instantly located on a map that he gave to Linda.

"I won't even start off with you," the young man said, "because that would mean an extra stop for you. Now—are you sure you are all right—and that you can stay awake?"

"Yes, I'm sure," replied the girl, forcing a smile. "Mrs. Cates has just given me a thermos bottle full of coffee, and a sandwich, to help me!"

A moment later she climbed into the cockpit and started the motor. The Pursuit, whose en-

gine purred with the smooth even whir of one in perfect order, gained speed until it rose into the air. It was Linda's first flight at night.

Darkness was all around her, but overhead the stars shone brightly, and the moon came from behind a cloud to light her way. Strange, lonely, mysterious, it seemed to her, as she flew through the night, but nevertheless thrilling. Gradually a sense of peace settled over her, as if a Divine Providence was surely guiding her, and she experienced the firm conviction that everything was right, that she was going to be successful in her mission to save her father's life.

For the first time she realized how much her confidence had to do with Ted Mackay. Because he had repaired and inspected the motor, she felt certain there would be no accident, and a successful flight was a good omen for the operation. Moreover, she had great faith in Dr. Lineaweaver. If he would only promise to come!

The hours passed, the moon set, the night grew darker. But the solitary girl flew on, swift and straight to her course, steadfast in her undertaking. About two o'clock she arrived at the little seaport, found a landing place back of the one big hotel, and went inside.

Fortunately a night clerk was on duty, and

he rose immediately to greet her. The flyer's costume identified her so that he had no need to ask what a girl of her age was doing alone at this early hour of the morning.

"Can you tell me where Dr. Lineaweaver, the surgeon, can be located?" she inquired. "I want him immediately—it is a question of my father's life."

Her voice was steady now; there was no danger of tears. She seemed almost mature as she spoke the words.

"Yes," replied the clerk. "He is staying at Dr. Grayson's bungalow—a couple of blocks away. They come over here for their meals."

"Could you get him on the telephone for me?"

"Certainly. I'll let you talk with him."

Although the clerk put in the call immediately, there was no answer for several minutes. A fishing trip had tired both doctors, and they were sleeping soundly. At last, however, there came a reply, and Linda took the telephone.

In a few words the unhappy girl apologized for the call at that hour, and during the surgeon's holiday, and briefly told her story. Eagerly she pleaded with him to dress and come immediately, informing him that she had her plane waiting.

"You mean you flew from Texas alone—at this hour of the night!" exclaimed the surgeon.

"Yes. But you needn't be afraid, Doctor, to go with me. I'm quite experienced. Oh please, please, say yes!"

"I'll be at the hotel in ten minutes," replied the great man. "And meanwhile, you get something to eat."

Linda sank gratefully into a chair, thinking that the hardest part of her task was over—the winning of Dr. Lineaweaver's consent to break into his vacation and go back with her. Now, if her father only lived until they returned, all would surely be well!

Still keeping herself in control, she ate her sandwich and drank her coffee, while she waited for the doctor to come. True to his word, he appeared in exactly ten minutes.

The flight back to the ranch was much pleasanter than the one to the seaport. No longer was Linda alone; it was a comfort to have the great surgeon with her, to know that he would do all in his power to save her father. The darkness gradually faded, giving place to a faint gray, and finally to a beautiful, inspiring sunrise. A dawn that perhaps meant new life to her father!

It did not take Dr. Lineaweaver long to real-

ize that Linda was an accomplished pilot, and he settled back into his seat in full enjoyment of the ride. His surprise at her youth—she was much younger than he had supposed from the telephone conversation—gradually gave way to admiration of her skill and her poise. He had no fear for his own safety; he was confident that she would make the journey without a mishap.

About seven o'clock she brought the Pursuit to a stop on the field that belonged to her father's ranch. Cates was already there to greet them.

"Is my father still alive?" she demanded, with the first indication of any strain in her voice.

"Yes," came the reassuring reply. "He is just the same."

"And did you succeed in getting a nurse?"

"Yes. Dr. Winston's here too. . . . Now, the Mrs. said to bring you both in for a hot breakfast."

Linda was so excited that she did not see how she could possibly eat, but when she realized that the surgeon must take time for something, she finally agreed. But first she tiptoed in for a look at her father, and gave him a kiss

that was really a prayer. A white-clad nurse smiled at her, and she believed hopefully that all was well.

The inaction, the weary, tense waiting of the next two hours was more difficult for Linda than her flight to Louisiana, alone in the darkness. She had nothing to do. Sleep was out of the question, yet she was terribly tired. But she could not sit still; aimlessly she followed Mrs. Cates around, begging for work. At last the good woman, realizing that the girl could not rest, set her to washing dishes and preparing vegetables for the noon-day meal.

But finally the operation was over, and Linda's heart stood still as she heard Dr. Winston coming out of her father's room. Suppose it had all been in vain! She covered her face with her hands, she dared not trust herself to look into his eyes, that would tell her, before he could utter the words, whether her father had lived.

And then came the glorious news that set her heart to singing as if the whole world had been recreated in joy and happiness:

"Your father is doing nicely, Miss Carlton. . . . Dr. Lineaweaver believes that he will get well."

Now the tears came in floods, tears of thank-

fulness and gladness, and she hugged Mrs. Cates in her ecstasy.

"It was a wonderful operation," continued Dr. Winston. "Dr. Lineaweaver is the greatest surgeon I have ever had the honor to watch."

"Thank God! Thank God!" murmured Mrs. Cates, reverently. . . . "And now, honey, you must go and get some sleep!"

"Not till I've thanked Dr. Lineaweaver!" protested Linda, and she ran off like a happy child, unmindful of the terrible strain she had just been through.

Chapter XXI

Honors for Linda

When Linda was permitted, the following day, to go in to see her father, she found him conscious, but she knew from his expression that he was suffering severe pain. However, he managed a feeble smile as she entered, that sent a surge of joy to her heart.

"Daddy!" she exclaimed, her voice choked with thankfulness, "you are going to get well!"

He gave an almost imperceptible nod.

"Yes, dear, thanks to you," he managed to murmur.

"You mean thanks to the Pursuit—and to Dr. Lineaweaver," she corrected. She wanted to add Ted Mackay's name to the list, but she felt it would not be wise.

Her father smiled; it was like Linda to disclaim any credit for herself.

"I phoned Aunt Emily last night," she added, "and she is coming out in a couple of days."

"Well, don't let her make a fuss over me," was his unexpected reply.

Linda squeezed his hand jubilantly; he was talking like himself again!

She did not stay with him long—the nurse thought fifteen minutes was enough—but she was satisfied. Now that she felt sure he was getting better, time no longer hung heavy on her hands. There was so much to do at the ranch—so many activities that she enjoyed. Hiking, fishing, riding horseback, even helping Cates with the kitchen garden or driving the battered Ford into Fort Worth on errands.

Her aunt arrived a few days later, bringing a trunk as usual. Linda laughed at the idea of carrying so many clothes to a ranch—she practically lived in her old riding-breeches and khaki shirt-waists—but Miss Carlton could not be comfortable unless she was perfectly dressed.

"Linda, my darling!" exclaimed the older woman, as they kissed each other. "Think how near I came to losing you!"

"Oh, no, Aunt Emily, you mustn't say that! Even though Lou and I were stranded, there was no danger of our dying. We could have hiked the whole way home, if it had been necessary."

"But you *almost* had a serious accident!"

"Well, we didn't. And since my plane saved Daddy's life, you're converted to them now, aren't you?" pleaded the girl.

"I do think they're useful," admitted the other. "And I really believe that you are an exceptionally fine pilot, my dear."

"It's awfully sweet of you to say that, Aunt Emily. . . . But don't let's talk about it any more. Come in and see Daddy. He's expecting you."

Miss Carlton was amazed and delighted to find that her brother's progress had been so rapid, and she began to talk immediately about taking him back to Green Falls with her, in a week or so. He could bring his nurse with him, perhaps charter a private car.

"Must we go back so soon, Aunt Emily?" asked Linda. "I love it here!"

"It's too wild for me," replied Miss Carlton. "And too lonely. Besides, we have to be on hand for Field Day. It's the biggest event of the summer at Green Falls."

"All right," agreed Linda pleasantly. "Whatever you say."

"By the way, did you tell your father about finding the necklace? When Louise came home with it, I thought Kitty Clavering'd go crazy!

Such a queer circumstance, too—you girls finding it the way you did!"

"No, I didn't tell Daddy yet," replied Linda, blushing. She had been afraid to bring Ted's name, or his father's, into the conversation with her father, when he was still so ill.

"You see, Daddy," she explained, turning to him, as he lay there quietly on his bed, "Lou and I were taking a trip in the Pursuit, and something went wrong with the motor, forcing us to land in a desolate spot. After our picnic supper, while Lou and I went swimming, we—we—came upon a wrecked plane, and—and—two dead men. The two thieves!" She paused, but suddenly remembered that her aunt did not know that one of the men was Ted's father, for that fact had been ascertained after Louise left. "And we got the necklace!"

"Whew!" exclaimed Mr. Carlton, in amazement at their luck, and horror at the experience. "Pretty sickening for you two girls! But, by the way, did the other fellow have red hair?"

"Yes, he did. Though Lou and I only saw him from a distance. We didn't want to go too near, for luckily the necklace was in the man's coat beside the wreck, and the bodies were some distance away."

Seeing that the subject was unpleasant to

Linda, Mr. Carlton never mentioned it to her again during her entire visit.

Three weeks passed happily, and her father was sitting up in his chair, when her aunt's restlessness became so apparent that Linda was willing to go back to Green Falls.

"You see I'm on the committee for Field Day, my dear," explained Miss Carlton, apologetically. "Besides, I hope you can take part in the events."

"How could I, Aunt Emily? I'm not in practice for golf or tennis, or any of the contests. I'm afraid I'd be a joke."

"I thought perhaps you might enter the airplane competitions," suggested her aunt, to Linda's consternation.

"Do you really mean it, Aunt Emily?" cried the girl, in delight. "Why, I'd adore that!"

"Well, we'll see what the program calls for. If it isn't anything too dangerous, like parachute jumping. . . . And another thing—it is very important for you to be on hand, because Louise is planning a surprise that you don't want to miss."

"Is she going to announce her engagement to Ralph Clavering, or Harriman Smith?"

"Not that I know of! She isn't engaged to Ralph, is she?"

"She wasn't when I last saw her. But absence often lends enchantment, you know!"

Miss Carlton looked searchingly into her niece's eyes, but she could see only laughter in them. "Wouldn't you mind a bit, Linda, if Louise married Ralph?" she inquired.

"Yes, certainly I'd mind," replied the girl seriously. "I don't think Ralph—or any other boy we know—is good enough for Lou!"

"Oh, is that all?"

"Yes, that's all. Marriage is too serious for either of us—yet. . . . Now tell me, Auntie, what you meant by that surprise!"

"You wait and see! It's something you'll like."

Linda thought perhaps it was the delightful party that greeted her when she landed, three days later, at Green Falls. All of the old crowd were there to welcome her—Louise and Dot Crowley, the two Claverings, Jim Valier and Harriman Smith, Sara Wheeler, Sue Emery, Maurice Stetson, and Joe Sinclair. They presented her with a beautiful little silver airplane, a model for her desk, which served a useful purpose as a stamp-box. Miss Carlton, who had arrived the day before by train, had arranged an elaborate dinner for the whole party.

There was so much to talk about—the cham-

pionships the young people were hoping to win, the airplane stunts for which two noted flyers had been engaged, the contests in flying that anyone with a private pilot's license might enter. In this last event they were all hoping to star Linda.

"Even a race, Linda," said Ralph, who seemed to have forgotten all about their quarrel. "You'll enter, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed!" replied the girl, her eyes shining with anticipation. "Aunt Emily has already given her consent."

Thinking there had been enough talking and too little dancing, Kitty Clavering suggested that they turn on the radio. She was wearing her pearl necklace, and rushing over every few minutes to kiss Linda or Louise, in appreciation of their having recovered it.

"This is to be our last party, for almost a week," she said. "Ralph says we all have to go in training—though I'd never win anything if I trained for years. But I can't do much, with all the rest of you practicing tennis and golf and swimming every minute, and going to bed at ten o'clock! So let's make this party good!"

The evening passed happily, and no one but Kitty seemed to resent the fact that they gave

up social activities and late hours for a few days. They all worked seriously at their own particular sports, and Linda practiced loops and speeding with her plane.

Labor Day dawned, hot but clear—splendid weather for the out-door event of the season. The Casino and the grounds around it were gayly decorated for the fête; a band supplied music whenever there was a lull, and refreshment-booths everywhere offered an opportunity for the guests to eat outside, if they did not prefer the more formal luncheon and dinner served at the restaurant.

Golf tournaments, swimming races and diving contests were on the program for the morning, and the finals in tennis were to be played off soon after lunch. Then came archery and quoits, drills by the Boy Scouts and a pageant by the Girl Scouts. The last thing before supper was the exhibition of flying.

Linda had decided not to go to the grounds in the morning, for she wanted to have a mechanic inspect her plane, to ascertain that everything was just right before her participation in the most spectacular event of the day. She arrived soon after luncheon in the Pursuit, leaving it at the runway behind the grounds, and strolling over to the tennis matches,

watched Ralph capture the men's singles' cup, and Dot Crowley take the women's.

She found the archery contest interesting, and almost wished she had entered, for her father had taught her the art of the bow. However, on the whole she was satisfied to concentrate all her energy upon flying.

The acrobatics came first on the program; two aviators of considerable repute in their profession had been advertised, although their names had not yet been divulged. What was Linda's amazement, when she heard Edward Mackay and Sam Hunter being introduced by the chairman! This had been her aunt's doing, no doubt, for the latter was on the committee. Was this the surprise she had so mysteriously mentioned, and if so, what was Louise's part in it?

A hush fell over the huge throng as they watched the two flyers ascend into the air and demonstrate all sorts of stunts for their amusement. The falling leaf, the Immelman turn, the inside loop, and the much more difficult outside loop—and a number of others to which even Linda could not give a name. Then finally, from a height of five thousand feet, Ted Mackay stepped off in a parachute and came safely to the ground.

While she had been watching these skillful yet dangerous performances, Linda's heart beat fast with excitement, her breath came in little gasps of fear or relief, as the stunt began fearfully or ended in safety. But now that her own turn was coming, she was surprisingly calm and self-possessed.

With five other amateur flyers, all of whom were young men, she taxied along the run-way and took off into the air, mounting to fifteen hundred feet, carefully keeping clear of her opponents. The looping began; she completed one inside loop after another, until she had scored six. Then she realized that she was too near the ground to take a chance with another, and it was too late to ascend again. With the wisdom of an Earhart or a Lindbergh, who never sacrifices safety for the sake of foolish publicity, she cautiously landed. A few minutes later the other planes all came down. Only one pilot, a college boy whom she had just met, scored over her by completing ten loops.

After a short interval of rest, the signal that was to start the race was given, and a moment later the gun went off, and six planes ascended again, this time aiming for speed.

As the Pursuit soared smoothly upward and then straight ahead, Linda experienced a great

surge of pride—not for herself, but for her wonderful little plane. It was almost as if it were a living thing, like a beloved horse. So light, so easy to guide, so sure of its power! On and on it sped, forging its way ahead, passing now one plane and then another until it came abreast of the leader. The thrill, the intoxication of the race took possession of the young aviatrix, and she urged it on to its fullest speed.

Now she was passing the one that had looked like the winner from the first! The shouts of her friends below were inaudible to her, but she could feel their applause in her heart. In another second the gun went off with a loud explosion which even the pilots could hear. The race was over; Linda Carlton, the only feminine entry, had won!

Her friends, even acquaintances and strangers, almost mobbed her when she finally landed. And the college boy who had come in second was nicest of all. He and Ralph, forming a seat with their hands, carried her high above their shoulders, through the crowd to the Casino where the prizes were to be awarded.

Two cups had been provided as a reward for the looping and the racing, and, amid the applause of hundreds, Linda and her new friend

received them. But that was not all; the chairman held up his arm for silence.

"I have another privilege!" he shouted, and the people suddenly became quiet. "Our club, which among other things fosters aviation for useful purposes, and is always on the lookout for deeds of courage which result in the saving of life, wishes to make an award for such an action. We have discovered, entirely unknown to her, that Miss Carlton made a record flight to bring a noted surgeon to her dying father, in time to perform the operation that saved his life. I therefore take great pleasure in awarding this medal to Miss Linda Carlton, of Green Falls!"

A deep wave of color surged over the girl's face as she listened to her own name in connection with the speaker's words. Was it possible that this great honor should come to her, when she had merely performed her duty, and been thankful to be able to do it? Her knees shook, her eyelids fluttered, as she blushingly stepped forward again. But she caught sight of Louise among the crowd—Lou, who had arranged this as her surprise—and then she saw her aunt, with Ted beside her, and she suddenly felt at ease, and smiled.

It was over at last, the applause and the con-

gratulations, and Linda was walking with these three back to her plane when she noticed a wheelchair, pushed by a white-clad nurse. It must be—it was—her father!

"Daddy!" she cried, pushing her way through the crowd to him. "You are here! How wonderful!"

"It is you who are wonderful, my dear girl!" he returned. "I am prouder than I have ever been in my life!"

"Daddy—" she lowered her voice—"you don't mind my being with Ted Mackay? Because Aunt Emily——"

"Of course not!" he interrupted. "I know all about the boy's part in saving you—your aunt told me. I—I—am ready to admit I was wrong. You will forgive me?"

"Why, of course!" She smiled joyfully; there was so much to be happy about now. "And may I have him for a friend?" she asked, timidly.

"So long as you don't marry him—or anybody else—for a long time!"

Her reply was reassuring:

"I won't, Daddy dear! My career as a flyer has only just begun!"

THE END

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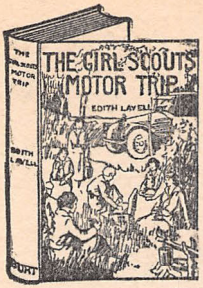

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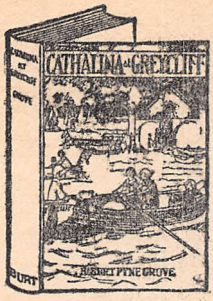

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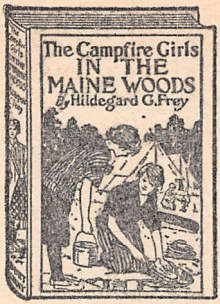

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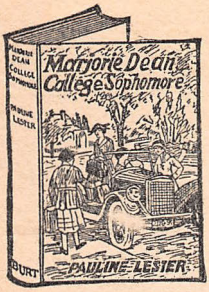

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